

Comprehensive Karate: from beginner to black-belt



**An Introduction to the History, Kata &
Practice of Traditional Karate-Do**

Michael J. Rosenbaum

A pilgrim was walking a long road when one day he passed what seemed to be a monk sitting in a field. Nearby men were working on a stone building.

“You look like a monk,” the pilgrim said.

“I am that,” said the monk

“Who is that working on the abbey?”

“My monks,” said the man. “I’m the abbot.”

“It’s good to see a monastery going up,” said the pilgrim.

“They’re tearing it down,” said the abbot.

“Whatever for?” asked the pilgrim.

“So we can see the sun rise at dawn,” said the abbot.

(Thomas Moore)

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By Michael J. Rosenbaum

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Second I'd like to thank Mr. Ed Francisco, two time Pulitzer nominee, member of the Oxford Round table and fighter extraordinaire. Ed was gracious enough to edit this work in spite of the demands of his own writing and training.

A very many thanks to Mr. Iain Abernethy world class karate-ka and kata expert, for making this text available on his website. It is through Iain's teachings, books, seminars and DVD's that the spirit of combative karate is being kept alive.

And last but not least, thank you to the divine spirit for keeping me safe while I travel this wonderful adventure we call life.

Dedication

In Memory of Richard Zulauf and Robert D. Marrs. Citizen Soldiers who fought the Second World War, came home and then raised families.

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**An Introduction to the History,
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Preface

by Iain Abernethy

It is a real pleasure to write this preface to Michael Rosenbaum's book! Michael is a very knowledgeable martial artist who is able to articulately and succinctly communicate that knowledge to his readers. I have really enjoyed Michael's books and was therefore delighted when he joined the forum on my website (iainabernethy.com). I've been delighted with how the forum has developed over the years and it is the participation of senior martial artists such as Michael that has helped to make the forum what it is.

A great community of pragmatically minded traditionalists has come together via the forum and the fact that it is a good source of quality information and discussion has led to it getting thousands of hits each and every day. Michael's prolific contribution and his willingness to share his knowledge and experiences have made him one of the most popular and highly valued members of the forum.

Many months ago, Michael informed me that he had written a book that he would like to give away to all the members and visitors to the site. Michael proposed that if I would typeset and prepare the text, he would be happy for the book to be given away to all those who wanted to read it. Having read the book – and it being apparent just how much work had gone in to it – I told Michael that I was totally happy to typeset the book, but that he should consider charging a nominal fee as a small recompense for the considerable labour he had obviously put into writing the book. As happy as I was that Michael wished to give the book away for free, I felt it would have been remiss of me if I did not suggest to this successful published author that he receive some recompense for all his efforts. Michael was firm that he wanted the book to be free of all charge so, my conscience appeased, I set about putting this e-book together.

As is the way with almost everything I do, typesetting the book took longer than I anticipated due to other demands on my time. As we approached the end of 2008 the book was finally getting close to completion. I emailed Michael – who had been incredibly patient with me – and suggested that we release the book on Christmas day as a gift for everyone. Michael liked the idea of playing Santa and we agreed to set everything up so that the thousands of subscribers to the monthly newsletters would find a download link waiting for them in their in-box on Christmas morning!

So that's the story of the free e-book that you are now reading. I'm sure you'll agree that Michael has been incredibly generous in making this book freely available to all. The old maxim of "you get what you pay for" does not hold true here! This is a truly great book on karate. The quality of information is sure to make this book fly around the web like wild fire! The fact it is free is simply a bonus. I know that you're going to really enjoy reading this e-book and that, like me, you are sure to be grateful to Michael for taking the time to write this book and for his generosity in making it freely available to all.

Iain Abernethy

Foreword

by Edward Francisco

As a historian of the Martial Arts, Michael Rosenbaum has few equals. His first three books earned him accolades, awards, and a devoted readership. Rosenbaum's status as both a fighter and a chronicler of the fighting arts is magnified in his most recent achievement: *Comprehensive Karate: From Beginner to Blackbelt*.

In this newest work, the author acknowledges Karate's fragmented status given its practitioners' tendency to view it as one thing or another: a sport or an art of self defense or a form of spiritual enlightenment. Too, commercial incentives have all but transformed Karate into a many-headed monster of untamable proportions.

Not only does Rosenbaum isolate the reasons for Karate's current crisis of identity, but he also seeks to show how disparate features of this popular fighting art fit into a unified field of connections that can be traced to the origins of empty-handed fighting, especially self-defense arts practiced in Okinawa. The cultural transmission of knowledge is a recurring theme in Rosenbaum's work. Such universals of Karate as kata offer an archetypal structure, a grammar, for transmitting essentials of the art while providing an opportunity for infinite variations.

As with all practicable arts, Karate has mutated in response to historical and cultural forces. Karate is neither fixed nor static. The author provides many examples, but one particular instance shows the import of historical occasion in influencing the role and direction of Karate from its infancy to the present. In chapter two, the writer explains how Sho Shin's fifteenth-century weapons ban spawned the development of empty-handed fighting arts on Okinawa. Later, however, the Samurai's use of firearms during their 1609 invasion of Okinawa made Karate obsolete as a battlefield martial art, while enshrining the fighting form as a model of personal protection.

Rosenbaum is quick to point out that Okinawa's small land mass and low population hindered its ability "to amass a large military force, thereby making it subservient to China and Japan, two countries which had enormous impact on the evolution of the Okinawan martial arts." Crucial to note is how important geography and geopolitical events were in Karate's historical development and how syncretism, a blending of styles and traditions, provided the impetus for karate's growth.

Rosenbaum reminds us that personality was just as important as place in ensuring Karate's popularity. *Comprehensive Karate: From Beginner to Black Belt* is a who's who of fascinating figures who contributed immeasurably to an art many of us have spent decades practicing. From Motobu to Miyagi to Funakoshi, Rosenbaum voices the singular accomplishments and knowledge imparted by those who deservedly can be called masters.

However, Rosenbaum is as concerned about Karate's future as he is as knowledgeable about its past. As the author notes in the epilogue to the book, "A fighting art evolves from mankind's

need to address specific combative scenarios. This process is influenced by the environment in which it takes place. Therefore, terrain, religious beliefs, social values and technology become determining factors. Consequently, if the intrinsic values of a society change, so will the fighting arts it gave birth to.”

In the brave new world of the fighting arts, all of us will be forced to address the role of powerful electronic media, increasing instances of senseless violence, and the role each of us must take in stemming chaos and creating a responsible society, if we are to be authentic practitioners of an art worthy of the name. Michael Rosenbaum has embarked on a courageous quest in helping us confront some of the most pressing problems facing us. It is rare that someone can paint both our predicament and potentiality with broad strokes while exercising deft and subtle touches in giving us an authentic depiction of ourselves. Yet, that is exactly what Rosenbaum has managed to do in this inspired work. In doing so he serves as an inspiration to us all.

Edward Francisco - Author of the Alchemy of Words

Introduction

The Changing Face of Karate

Since the rise of karate's notoriety in the 1920's, its identity has been constantly changing and often at odds with the cultural mores that gave birth to it, a phenomenon which has generated contention among its practitioners for many years now.

More often than not, we alter karate to stimulate our immediate needs instead of changing our lifestyles to fit its traditions, a custom that raises many questions about the fighting art's role in the postmodern world. Is karate a sport, a business, or a system of self defense? Should it be used for exercise or spiritual enlightenment? Is it of Japanese or Okinawan ancestry? Does one practice with weapons or only emptyhands? The list is long and often shortsighted, but the questions' magnitude affects karate on a worldwide scale.

For the patriarchs of modern karate, men like Choki Motobu, Chojun Miyagi, Kenwa Mabuni and others of this caliber, the fighting art's identity was never in question because they viewed its multifaceted role with equal measure. Karate could be a pathway for building one's spirit just as it could be a tool for self defense: it was both an art and a means of better health, a channel of self expression and a way to interact with others. These roles were interchangeable and as diverse as the manner in which the Okinawans practiced their native fighting art. However, within this framework of eclectic ideas remained a consistent reasoning which kept the parameters of karate firmly established, thereby allowing its practitioners to reap both physical and spiritual rewards.

One's reasons dictate one's motivation. Consequently, should our reasons for studying karate limit us to one facet of this multifaceted endeavor, then our personal growth stops and we are left with a meaningless experience. Karate is an allegory for life, a catalyst which develops the whole human. Its study, though enlightening, is an arduous journey that pits the karate-ka against the toughest opponent of all, them self.

Given the nature of this process, the first six years of practice are usually the most difficult, for this is when the student sorts through a multitude of ideas and philosophies in order to understand what karate is and why he or she has undertaken its study. However, this quest continues throughout the karate-ka's lifetime, and it results in karate's transcending the role of fighting art and becoming a means to enhance one's life. Therefore, this book's message is intended for both novice and advanced practitioner. Its purpose is to show that karate serves not one, but many functions, all of which can help us lead a healthier, more fruitful existence.

Chapter 1

Karate

As your flight lands at Naha Airport, you look out the jet's window and see a bustling city filled with department stores, tourists and traffic jams. Okinawa, the birth place of karate, has changed much since the Second World War's end. Within this modern metropolis it is hard to imagine the island's lifestyle as once being based on trade, farming and fishing. However, it was from such an existence that karate evolved, and yet as society has changed, so has karate.

Although history is a continuum of time, four main periods have influenced karate's present form. The first is Sho Shin's 15th century weapons edits which restricted the wearing of swords on Okinawa. This was an impetus for the development of empty-handed strategies that, when combined with Chinese boxing styles, became the foundation upon which karate was built.

The second stage of evolution occurred when the Okinawan fighting art of Tode was introduced to Japan during the 1920's. This was an epic turning point in karate's history, one when an agrarian based tradition was assimilated by an industrialized society. As such, Tode become known as karate and its practice, which previously had been an intimate transaction between student and sensei, came to be undertaken by a large following of Japanese, many of whom were university students.

The third period of karate's history was the Showa era when Japan's military government sought to imbue every Japanese citizen with a martial ethos. Many instruments were used to accomplish this task, one being the modern Budo. Judo, Kendo and Karate became tools for developing militaristic mindsets in Japan's young men and women through organized competition. This emphasis instilled in karate competitive elements and a quasi-martial spirit, both remaining to this day.

The fourth period of evolution took place during the post-war years when karate was introduced to the West where its popularity exploded. Television, movies and commercialism turned the fighting art into a profitable industry at odds with its source values, making the word karate synonymous with cardio-kickboxing, a trend which continues today. Therefore, to understand karate's rich legacy, we must first examine its birthplace, Okinawa.

Okinawa's Emerging Martial Traditions

Stretching from the southern tip of Kyushu, 735 miles southeast to Taiwan, the Ryukyu Islands are a day's sail from Japan and lie within the shadow of mainland China. The name Okinawa literally means "a rope in the offing," an appropriate description for these islands whose role in history has been dictated by geography, not military might.

Sea travel has always influenced Okinawan culture with its earliest inhabitants migrating during prehistoric times, seeking better land to farm, game to hunt and fertile waters to fish in. However, prior to the sweet potato's introduction during the 17th century, Okinawa had not the resources to support a large population. Poor soil composition, lack of land, drought, cholera and primitive agricultural techniques kept its population low. Thus Okinawans were never able to equip and train a large standing military, unlike China and Japan which possessed long standing martial traditions and professional armies. Instead Okinawa was left to rely upon trade and diplomacy to maintain its sovereignty.

For the Okinawans evolution from Neolithic tribes into the city-state period mirrors that of other cultures but on a smaller scale. By the 11th century A.D. the island was divided into the three kingdoms of Hokuzan, Chuzan and Nanzan, each ruled by a baron whose powerbase rested upon the armed might of local warlords called *Anji*. History shows us that as cultures evolve from primitive tribes into city states, a warrior class will grow within this process. As Sir Richard Burton, the famous English explorer and hoplologist wrote, "The first effort of human technology was probably weapon making. History tells us of no race so rude as to lack an artificial means of offense and defense." (Burton, *The Book of the Sword*, 1) This was very much the case during Okinawa's warring states period because the use of weapons in combat was the norm, not the exception during this time.

Given its proximity to China and Japan, the proliferation of weapons and fighting arts from these countries to Okinawa dates back many years. Japanese adventures and pirates were at times welcomed to the island because of their martial knowledge, and during the twelfth century A.D., survivors from the Gempei wars (1180-85) escaped to Okinawa, bringing with them their martial skills and weapons. In 1393, a Chinese community was established near Naha. Known as the 36 families of Fukien, some historians believe the settlers also acquainted the Okinawans with Chinese martial arts, an act which possibly coincided with fighting arts from other Asian cultures, such as Thailand and the Philippines, being introduced to the island.

Wrestling is one of the oldest forms of body to body combat practiced by man. Known as Tegumi on Okinawa, it is a long standing tradition in Ryukyuan culture and was probably used on Okinawa's feudal battlefields with preexisting weapons systems. Martial innovations often stem from various sources; therefore, when Tegumi merged with fighting arts imported from other cultures- China, Siam, Japan and the Philippines- a system called Te, which literally means hand, evolved on Okinawa. Author Ron Mottern suggested that Te had both a strong Japanese influence and intimate relationship with weapons when he wrote, "Although Te literally means 'hand' the art has always been intimately associated with the use of weapons, so much so that advanced empty-hand forms precisely corresponded to applications with weapons. The primary weapons of Te are the sword (katana), spear (yari), and halberd (naginata), which were also the principle weapons of the Japanese Bushi (warrior). Te footwork and taijutsu (techniques for maneuvering the body also suggest a Japanese origin to the art" (Mottern, *Martial Arts of The World*, 364). Te was not regulated

to just one of the three feudal Okinawan kingdoms, but was used by all of them. Likewise, its use in battle gave rise to a martial art in which archers, swordsmen and spearmen operated in conjunction with one another, on the battlefield, and as organized units.

The martial arts of Feudal Japan and China, achieved a level of sophistication that rivaled their European counterparts. Whether Okinawan Te reached an equal level would be hard to judge, but sophistication alone does not determine a fighting art. In 1979 the International Hapology Society proposed the following definition for a fighting art: “A body of organized, codified, repeatable actions, techniques, behavior, and attitudes the primary intended function and planful design of which is to be used in/for combative situations” (Armstrong, *Weapons and Systems*, 26). Therefore, Te was, by all rights, a codified martial system consisting of both armed and unarmed strategies which would influence karate’s development at a later date in history.

Chapter 2

The Rise of Okinawan Civil Fighting Arts

With the growth of man’s intellect the sophistication of his weapons increased. Furthermore the use of these weapons in mortal combat generated the development of systematic fighting arts. However, since all weapons are not created for the same purpose, different fighting arts evolved to meet different forms of combat.

Over time, as civilization developed and warfare grew deadlier, the fighting arts expanded into three broad but basic categories: combative sports practiced for the arena, martial arts found exclusively on the battlefield and civil fighting arts used for personal defense. Although both the martial arts and civil fighting arts are employed in mortal combat, the manner in which mortal combat is fought depends upon the social/political reasons influencing the engagement. Battlefield martial arts are used to further states’ policies and within their arsenals can be found a multitude of weapons ranging from those used by the individual soldier to crew-served weaponry such as cannon. Similarly, body armor is also worn by soldiers on the battlefield where combat is normally fought on broken terrain.

Contrary to battlefield systems, civil fighting arts, such as karate, usually have no political agendas. Their role is to provide the citizen with a means of self-defense against muggers, thugs and criminals. The civil fighting arts arsenal normally relies upon empty-handed foot and hand techniques, in addition to everyday implements such as walking sticks, agricultural tools and household items for weapons. Civil systems are intended for man-to-man combat on the city street or the shop floors level surface.

Although both systems of fighting are constantly evolving to meet existing threats, battlefield martial arts are usually the most technologically advanced due to warfare’s harsh demands.

Seldom does a battlefield martial art devolve into a lesser form of fighting. Yet, this was the case on Okinawa where Te became a civil fighting art.

The chart below the page illustrates the differences and similarities of between Okinawan civil fighting arts and battlefield martial arts.

Battlefield Martial Arts		Civil Fighting Art (Karate)
Body Armor:	Worn	Not Worn
Role of Weapons:	Primary	Secondary*
Type of Weapons:	Sword to Cannon	Agricultural Tools/Common objects/
Styles Purpose and Nature:	Mortal Combat	Mortal Combat or Sport
Use of Grappling:	Yes	Yes
Use of Meditation:	Yes	Yes
Empty-Hand Techniques Role:	Secondary	Primary in most styles
Used By:	Warrior class	Civilian/Commoner
Battleground:	Broken Terrain	Indoors or City Street
Type of Combat:	Formation Based	Singular
Combat's Purpose:	Political	Personal protection

*This analogy applies only to Okinawan combatives.

A New Face for an Old Tradition

Initially, the Okinawan gentry held the right to overthrow a ruling king, but as Japanese influences grew stronger upon Ryukyuan culture this custom changed until the king held absolute power. This shift in governmental rule both enhanced the monarchy's power and impacted the development of Te.

It was during the period known as the "Great Days of Chuzan" when King Sho Shin (1477-1526) issued two mandates that altered Te's practice and laid the foundation upon which modern karate rest. The first one, which was intended to reduce the risk of armed rebellion, curtailed the wearing of swords and required that excess weapons, those not used by Sho Shin's forces, be stored in a Shuri warehouse and issued only in time of national emergencies. Although not eliminating weapons entirely from Okinawan society, this imperial order helped shift attentions towards empty-handed strategies. And in time it changed Te's orientation from that of a battlefield martial art to a civil fighting art used

for personal protection. Thus, where as the fighting arts practice was previously weapons based, empty-handed strategies now assumed dominance while weapons training took on a supporting role.

Even though civil fighting arts mirror those used on the battlefield in that they make use of weapons, empty-handed strikes, blocks, grappling and footwork, the manner in which these strategies are used differs because of contrasting circumstances. For instance, empty-hand techniques used on the battlefield are not intended for punching through the enemy's armor, but are designed to keep an adversary stationary long enough to be killed with either a sword or knife. However, the opposite proves true in civil fighting arts, for when no armor is worn then the entire limb is used to strike with, and this gives birth to formal techniques like the chop, spear-hand, and heel stomp kick.

Blocking is another strategy that changed because combat fought with a sword requires deflecting actions and evasive footwork to avoid oncoming cuts. No portion of the warrior's body should be touched by the sword's blade since a grievous wound, or death, will occur. In contrast, civil fighting arts can use the whole arm for blocking since combat is often fought between unarmed individuals. This allows the fighter to 'mold with' an oncoming attack and precipitates the need for training exercises like Kakie, the Okinawan version of sensing hands.

Range is also crucial in civil fighting, for as combat shifts to arms' distance, the need for slipping and circular body movements, in addition to solid stances that can generate power and facilitate limb- to- limb blocks, arises. This is the result of the unlimited number of foot-fist combinations encountered in close range fighting. As such, the body's movements are designed to enhance the fighter's empty-hand strategies by providing mobility and power, two qualities that are essential for all styles of fighting.

Terrain was another consideration as Te metamorphosed into a civil fighting art. On the battlefield a warrior's footing is precarious due to loose rock, hillsides, ditches, streams and mud. Therefore, natural fighting stances like the hunter's crouch are used to prevent the warrior from falling during combat. Contrasting this are the shop's floor and level city street allowing the civil fighter a multitude of movements that would be almost impossible to perform on the battlefield. Hence, the civil fighter is able to execute one-leg stances, balance on the balls of his feet, distribute body weight unevenly and even mimic animals, all of which imbue a civil fighting art with characteristics different to those of the battlefield arts.

Sho Shin's second mandate, which consolidate his powerbase by having the Anji to relocate into Shuri, helped establish Te in the Shuri, Tomari, Naha areas. And as interest for the Okinawan fighting arts grew, particularly during the 19th and 20th centuries, these towns became the point of origin to which many styles of karate trace their lineage today.

Enter the Satsuma

Sixteenth century Okinawa has often been compared to Venice, one of the European Renaissance's wealthiest cities. Like Venice, Okinawa was a mercantile power whose businessmen played host to nations that sought trade but were not on diplomatic terms. By the seventeenth century, Okinawa, because of European encroachment and Japanese pirates, had restricted its trade to China and Japan since they were in closer sailing distance to its ports. This decision, while making for safer sailing, also placed Okinawa in the position of having to pay tribute to both China and Japan, two nations frequently at odds with one another.

The martial traditions of seventeenth century Japan had evolved into sophisticated disciplines that addressed all aspects of battlefield combat. Yet, despite their ethnocentric views, the Japanese, like other men of arms, also embraced a pragmatic realism towards combat. Advancements in arms and armor were always sought, one of which came in 1543 from Portuguese traders who sold firearms to the Shimazu family, long-time rulers of Satsuma province. Soon afterwards Japanese gunsmiths began manufacturing the weapons, and by 1590 hand held firearms were commonplace on Japan's battlefields.

Despite having bought arms from the Portuguese, the Japanese were suspicious of European encroachments since trade was not an option with them, but an ultimatum that often led to invasion. George Kerr observed about European policies that "The white men were willing to trade, but only on their own terms; they gave no quarter to anyone bold enough or foolish enough to refuse their demands. The more prosperous the port, the greater the danger it would be seized and sacked or declared a possession newly 'discovered for a Christian King'" (Kerr, *Okinawa The History of an Island People*, 124).

Geographically, Okinawa is a stepping stone to Japan proper; therefore, its occupation by a European power would make Japan's southern most provinces vulnerable. Moreover Japan's 'strategic' concern was compounded by Okinawa's relationship with China. In 1592, Toyotomi Hideyoshi petitioned supplies and troops from Okinawa to support his invasion of Korea. However, the Okinawans denied his request for fear of insulting China, a country that Hideyoshi ultimately planned to conquer. This was not the last time the island nation would shun Japanese dominance because Tokugawa Ieyasu, who became Shogun after his victory at Sekigahara in 1600, received a similar response from the Okinawan court in 1606.

A warlike clan by nature, the Satsuma had opposed Tokugawa Ieyasu at the battle of Sekigahara. As fate would have it, they survived the battle's outcome then established an uneasy peace with the new Shogun from their stronghold in Southern Kyushu. It was there, far away from Tokugawa's Edo based government that the Satsuma contended with the Shogun's rule. However, since they needed official sanction to trade outside of Japan, a situation arose whereby the government allowed the Satsuma to conduct business, thus preventing their rebellion and averting another large scale war.

Seeking the Shogun's appeasement in 1606, Satsuma Lord Shimazu Yoshihisa demanded Okinawa to pay homage to Tokugawa, since he was now ruler of Japan. The petition was ignored by the Okinawan court, and the Satsuma, who saw an opportunity to gain favor with Tokugawa, offered to punish the Okinawans for not submitting to the Shogun's rule. Ieyasu Tokugawa granted the Satsuma's request, realizing that it would keep the clan occupied with affairs outside of Japan, as well as safeguard Okinawa against European invasion. But there were ulterior motives involved, one being money. The Satsuma's finances were depleted by years of warfare, and since they could not expand their territory northward, there was only one direction in which to move, south towards Okinawa. In 1609, 3000 Satsuma warriors landed on the Motobu Peninsula, brushing aside what resistance awaited them, they advanced on Shuri.

Firearms and the Fate of Okinawa's Fighting Arts

Although many people consider the 17th century an age when sword to sword combat flourished, in reality, firearms dominated most of the world's battlefields at this time. And despite the fact that the Samurai may have initially considered their use in violation of the code of man-to-man combat, the Arquebus soon gained mass appeal. This was especially so with the development of tactics allowing drilled units to maintain a consistent rate of fire, thereby increasing the weapon's effectiveness. With these developments, the distance at which combat was fought increased, and the frequency at which close quarters combat occurred decreased. There was, however, another advantage the Arquebus offered and that was training. Whereas it normally took three to five years preparation for a warrior to be skilled enough to fight on the battlefield with sword and spear, bow and arrow, any common foot soldier could be taught to load and fire an Arquebus within a few weeks, if not days.

In Japan, where by the beginning of the 16th century armies relied heavily on the use of *ashigaru* (peasant foot soldiers), the Arquebus allowed a *damiyo* (feudal lord) to equip and train his forces in a relatively short amount of time, and by the late 16th century, *ashigaru* units equipped with Arquebus often dominated an army's ranks. About the Japanese's attitudes towards firearms, Stephen Turnbull wrote that "One additional reason for the popularity of the arquebus lies with the changing social composition of armies. We have noted a decline in the use and potential of the Japanese bow from before the Mongol invasions and that with the increase in the size and scope of armies the lower classes were beginning to play a greater part. Now whereas it took years of practice and the development of strong muscles to shoot well with the bow, a person could be taught within a few days to shoot an Arquebus with all the accuracy of which the weapon was capable" (Turnbull, *The Samurai A Military History*, 140).

When the Satsuma landed on the Motobu peninsula, the resistance offered by the Okinawans was quickly swept aside because one third, if not more, of the invading force was equipped with firearms. Morio Higaonna describes the Satsuma's assault in his book *The History Karate*: "On April 1, the Satsuma army separated into two forces. One, led by

Kabayama, proceeded to the port of Yomitan from which they then attacked and burned Urasoe Castle and Ryufukuji Temple. They advanced as far as Shuri Castle, the residence of the king. Kabayama's army was met at the bridge of Shuri Castle by defiant islanders armed with nothing more than sticks



Shuri Castle

and bamboo spears. The Satsuma force of between 1,000 and 1,500 men, armed with guns, advanced onto the bridge. Bullets from their guns fell like rain and the islanders were forced to retreat into the castle” (Higaonna, *The History of Karate*, 3).

The Satsuma's possession of firearms allowed them to unleash a devastating barrage on the Okinawans, which produced horrendous effects, both physically and psychologically. It was after the volleys of gunfire subsided that survivors were killed by spear and sword. And, as in Europe where the sword and spear were becoming obsolete, on Okinawa traditionally armed warriors were defeated by soldiers with guns. Hence, the Okinawan martial traditions became suitable only for personal defense due to changing social climates and new trends in warfare.

After their successful invasion the Satsuma organized an elaborate network of informers and spies, known as *metsuke*, to provide them with detailed information on the island's inhabitants. This resulted in the practice of Te being conducted in seclusion and often among family members. Shoshin Nagamine, writing about this period in Okinawa's history, noted that “The development of the art of te accelerated with the subjugation of the Ryukyus in 1609 by the Satsuma clan of Japan. The Satsuma banned the use of all weapons and the practice of martial arts by all Ryukyuan. Despite the enforcement of this ban for over three hundred years, the art of te was not lost. The forbidden art was passed down from father to son among the samurai class in Okinawa. Training went on in secret; devotees practiced in hidden and remote places, meeting between midnight and dawn for fear of informers. Having to study secretly and at great risk did not discourage those of martial and enterprising spirit; rather it inspired them to greater efforts” (Nagamine, *The Essence of Okinawan Karate-Do*, 21). Given these circumstances, te's practice became a very personalized endeavor whose qualitative dimensions were left up to individual interpretation. It was a fighting art based not on group conformity, but on the individual's development. A tradition which remained firmly ensconced until the twentieth century.

Chapter 3

Tode: Forefather of Modern Karate

Despite being an occupied nation Okinawa was able to export precious metals from Japan to China. Once in China, Okinawan's bought merchandise and sold it back to the Japanese. The Satsuma's part in this business venture was that of investor and tax collector. They co-invested in the precious metals trade, collecting taxes from the Okinawans sales profits. However, being the merchants they were, the Okinawans often fared better in these transactions than did the Satsuma, and in time, found it beneficial to have the Satsuma as overseers. This strategy owed to the Satsuma's influence on the Tokugawa government, without which Okinawa would have been hard pressed to continue its trade with China.

Because of this three-way business venture, Okinawa was able to send many of its young men to China for their education. The 19th century, often regarded as a renaissance period on Okinawa, saw these relations reach a high point when To-te Sakugawa, Kanryo Higaonna and others brought back new styles of fighting from China which, when assimilated into Okinawan culture, became known as Tode, literally Chinese boxing.

As Tode was assimilated into the Okinawan culture and began intermixing with preexisting systems of te, the new styles that evolved were associated with the town in which they were practiced. Naha-Te denoted those systems practiced in Naha; the same hold true for Shuri-Te and Tomari-Te. This method of classification was based not on the cities per se, but on the individual preferences of those who practiced within the cities. Tode describes not one, but several systems of Chinese boxing that were practiced eclectically on Okinawa.

The impetus for these cities becoming hubs of development for the Okinawan fighting arts comes from several sources. One was Sho Shin's mandate requiring the Anji to move into Shuri. Others were economics and overcrowding. By the 17th century, as much as a third of the Okinawan population fell within either the noble or gentry's ranks, forcing a redistribution of their numbers into Naha and Tomari. However, the abolishment of the Okinawan monarchy by Japan in 1879 is quite possibly what solidified these cities as focal points for the development of Okinawan karate.

Prior to the 19th century, Okinawa's social hierarchy consisted of the nobility, who were either members of the royal family or else related to the royal family, the *shizoku*, or gentry' class consisting of artisans, craftsmen, civil servants, castle guards and law enforcement officials, and the commoners, or *heimin*. It was the *heimin* who worked the fields, fished or else performed manual labor, but with the abolishment of the Okinawan monarchy in 1879 many of the gentry and noble classes were reduced to the level of commoners, forcing them to find gainful employment in order to avoid poverty. Many of the disposed moved

into the cities in search of work. One such example was karate legend Chotoku Kyan (1870-1945) who, although a Sho family descendant, lived much of his life in poverty because his family's ancestral entitlements were negated 1879. When he was not cultivating silkworms, farming or attending cockfights, Kyan taught at his home. It was there that many of Shorin-ryu Karate's leading exponents such as Shoshin Nagamine, Joen Nakazato and Eizo Shimabuku, benefited from his instruction.

With the monarchy's abolishment, formal nobles like Chotoku Kyan intermarried, developed friendships and became fully assimilated into the commoners' ranks. This intermixing of the two classes was to be the beginning of Tode's introduction to the Okinawan populace at large with much of the exposure occurring in the three cities of Shuri, Naha and Tomari.

Modern theories concerning Karate's history often claim that when the Satsuma occupied Okinawa, an island wide resistance movement began. A parallel might be that of France, during World War II. Thus Karate was seen as a means to fight the Japanese. Yet, as romantic as this notion may seem, it was not the case. The practice of Te, and latter systems of Tode, were initially resigned to the noble and gentry classes because they were the only ones who had the time, resources and ambitions to study the fighting arts. The peasant's harsh lifestyle afforded him neither the means nor motivation to practice since his concerns were about food, shelter and water. George Kerr observed about the difference in lifestyles: "The Okinawan peasant was obliged and conditioned to work in the community interest. From birth until death his tasks were allotted to him. He developed no large sense of individual rights or 'natural privileges'. He had few worldly goods; in a mild climate and a static agricultural society he needed few; hard work benefited the community, not the individual" (Kerr, *Okinawa History of an Island People*, 197).

However, with the abolishment of the Okinawan monarchy and Japan's annexation of Okinawa at the end of the 19th century, tode became assessable to commoners as members of the gentry class, like Chotoku Kyan, were forced to seek employment and live a plebian lifestyle. Likewise, the fighting art's popularity gained another significant boost when Japan's Meiji government established primary, middle and high schools on Okinawa, where by 1888 students wore uniforms instead of the topknot and kimono. Through the school system, the Meiji government sought not only to educate its youth but to tear down feudal alliances and replace them with nationalistic views loyal to the emperor. Given these circumstances, and the fighting art's inclusion in the school's teaching curriculum, tode's exposure would increase tenfold within the next twenty years as it came to be practiced by young and old alike.



“Chinese Hand”

Chapter 4

The Empty Hand Art

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Japan was one of the world's fastest growing military powers. Within a short period of fifty years, 1854-1904, the country had gone from possessing virtually no naval force, to having its western styled battleships annihilate Russian forces at Port Arthur during the 1904-05 Russo-Japan war. The feat both shocked the world and established Japan as an equal with Britain, France, Germany and the United States.⁽¹⁾

Much of the reason for Japan's military success lay with the Meiji government (1868-1912) that abolished the Samurai class, replacing it with a conscript army drawn from all walks of life. Of this transition Richard Humble wrote that, "This was not done overnight – clans like the Satsuma continued to rebel as late as 1877. But the aftermath - indeed, the underlying purpose-of the Meiji Restoration was to make Japan strong enough on land and sea to hold her own with the European interlopers in the Far East. And this was done by the most direct means at Japan's disposal: taking carbon copies of modern institutions - political, social, industrial, and military-from the European powers whom she was planning to emulate" (Humble, *Japanese High Seas Fleet*, 9).

The new Japanese army was equipped with modern weapons and organized in the same manner as Western militaries. France, Britain and America all provided arms and training to the Meiji army where soldiers fought as cohesive members of their squad, platoon and company. The infantryman's bolt action rifle replaced the samurai sword, and the machinegun became the battlefield's dominating weapon. Firepower and small unit tactics took precedence over the Samurai vanguard, which traditionally had been considered the army's most honored position since it was first into battle.

In addition to modernizing the military, the Meiji reforms also transformed Japan's feudal society into a nation ruled by a unified government, thereby eliminating internal strife among rival clans. With this transformation, Shinto became a tool for projecting the emperor's omnipotence and furthering government policies. Likewise, the teaching curriculum at Japanese schools espoused a nationalistic ideology designed to produce loyal citizens. As Mori Arinori, the minister of education from 1885 to 1889, stated, "The principle of education shall hereafter be to cultivate persons who will be the faithful subjects required by the Empire." (McClain, *A Modern History of Japan*, 262). During this period the Dai Nippon Butokukai (Great Japan Martial Virtues Association) was established to preserve the classical martial arts (Koryu Bujutsu) and promote the *Shin Budo*, or new Budo, including systems like Judo and Kendo, which by 1911 were included in the school's teaching curriculums.

At the turn of the 20th century, Okinawa had been under Japanese domination for almost three hundred years. During this time the practice of Tode had gone relatively unnoticed by the Japanese until the Sino-Japan war (1895-96) when an army doctor observed the well developed physiques of several Okinawan conscripts. When asked how they came to be in such splendid shape, their answer was “Te.” This sparked an interest among the Japanese who were constantly seeking new weapons and tactics to improve their military.

Initially Japan’s military expressed interest in using Tode to develop the physical stamina and martial élan of its soldiers; however, given the lack of standardized teaching formats, the idea was abandoned. As karate historian Patrick McCarthy explained, “However, the military ultimately abandoned this idea due to a lack of organization, impractical training methods, and the great length of time it took to gain proficiency” (McCarthy, *The Bible of Karate Bubushi*, 53). Despite this initial rejection, Tode’s ability to develop sound minds and bodies became the focal point of a successful campaign, led by Itosu Anko in 1901, to make it part of the Okinawan schools teaching curriculum. Itosu, influenced by both nationalistic pride and western ideologies, saw in tode a means by which Okinawan youths could be molded into loyal citizens who would contribute to the growth of both Japanese and Okinawan societies.

This was the first time Tode had been offered to the public on a large scale basis. Before this event, it had been a very personal and time consuming practice in which the learning of *Hojo-undo*-supplementary exercises like strength training and sticky hands, along with basic techniques took several years. Traditionally the student was taught a small number of kata, sometimes only one, and often was the case that no two students were privy to the same kata. This was because many instructors felt particular kata were better suited for some individuals than for others given differences in body size, skill levels and personalities. Mori Higaonna wrote about Choju Miyagi and his way of teaching, noting that “Miyagi did not teach students all the kata of the system. Rather, after several years of Sanchin kata training, he selected one or two kata he felt suited that individual student which was called *tokuigata*” (Higaonna, *History of Karate*, 63).

Likewise, with its presentation to the public Tode class sizes increased and this too went against traditional venues. In his 1978 interview with Mr. Ernest Estrada, karate legend Hohan Soken (1889-1982), 10th dan of the Matsumura Orthodox Shorin-ryu, stated that “Back then, there weren’t large followings of students for a master of the warrior arts. Itosu Ankoh had less than a dozen students and he was one of the greatest of teachers at the time. My uncle had only one student, and that was me. He was still a practitioner with an ‘old mind’ and would only teach or demonstrate for family members” (Estrada, *Interview With Hohan Soken*, 1).

With Tode’s introduction into the public schools, such longstanding traditions were cast aside in favor of new ones that emulated western military parade drills. And while these drills enabled one Sensei to oversee a large group of students, it shifted Tode’s focus away

from the individual, resulting in a group ethos being formed as practitioners underwent a bonding process induced by the rhythmic movements they performed during training.⁽²⁾

While enhancing the group's identity karate's new syllabus reduced the individual's ability to empower himself through the practice of karate. Cambridge don and literary historian C.S. Lewis noted about similar philosophies effects on western education: "Where the old initiated, the new merely 'conditions.' The old dealt with it pupils as grown birds deal with young birds when they teach them to fly; the new deals with them more as the poultry-keeper deals with young birds-making them thus or thus for purposes of which the birds know nothing. In a word, the old was a kind of propagation-men transmitting manhood to men; the new is merely propaganda" (Lewis, *Miracles*, 23). Moreover, eclecticism, a long-standing tradition in the Okinawan fighting arts, would also be frowned upon. Other modifications brought forth from Tode's introduction into the Okinawan school system included less emphasis on combative technique and more on physical fitness. This shift resulted in the modification of techniques to ensure safety during practice. Also included in the syllabus was Itosu Anko's recently developed Pinan kata.

Itosu's innovations did not stop with the Pinan Kata; he also authored ten precepts of karate which served as a guideline for the student's moral and martial ethos. This regimen was consonant with the Meiji doctrines, and many Okinawans, bearing witness to the changing times, decided to embrace Japan's worldviews rather than contest them. This willingness to incorporate Japanese perspectives meant that karate stepped out of the agrarian world and into the industrialized one.

To Japan

By 1921, Tode had become part of the Okinawan Police academy's training program, as well as having gained island-wide notoriety. Tode was also considered by some of its leading practitioners to be a cultural asset, quite possibly the only indigenous cultural asset the Okinawans had to offer the outside world.

As its fame grew on Okinawa so did Tode's reputation expand in Japan. While on a return trip from Europe in 1921, Crown Prince Hirohito witnessed a Tode demonstration at Shuri castle. In his biography, Gichin Funakoshi (1868-1957) spoke of the honor he had leading the demonstration and of the Crown Prince's delight: "Later I was told that the prince said he had been much impressed by three things in Okinawa: the lovely scenery, the Dragon Drain of Magic Fountain in Shuri Castle and Karate" (Funakoshi, *Karate Do My Way of Life*, 43). Tode's new teaching format would serve as a stepping stone for its acceptance by the Dai Nippon Butokai. Yet before being recognized, this Okinawan fighting art would have to be assimilated into Japanese culture.

In the fall of 1921, Japan's ministry of education began planning an exhibition of martial arts to take place in Tokyo the following year. Chosen to represent Okinawa by the Okinawa board of education was Gichin Funakoshi, a retired school teacher.

Funakoshi was selected because of his education background. Quite certain that he would give an erudite and scholarly presentation the Okinawan board of education was not disappointed. After Funakoshi arrived in Japan he tailored his demonstrations to meet the expectations of intellectuals and professionals, whose response was very enthusiastic.

Japan's enthusiasm for karate was due partially to the low appeal classical Japanese martial arts held during the Taisho era (1912-26), a time when many Japanese considered these fighting styles outdated relics of a bygone era. But with karate, Japanese society saw something new, a method by which many believed they could achieve better health and cultivate their spirit. Therefore, different values were placed upon karate by the Japanese than those held by the Okinawans. ⁽³⁾

The Okinawans considered karate as a fighting art first, by which, through constant practice, one achieved better health and personal realizations. However, many Japanese saw it just the opposite. Karate to them was an endeavor by which one's mind and body were first disciplined through rigorous training. Only afterwards did the practitioner enter its combative realms. Thus, two differing philosophies began to develop around karate's practice, each with its own merits. For while its self-defense capabilities could not be ignored, karate's ability to strengthen one's spirit and body held much appeal too.

What was to have been a brief trip for Gichin Funakoshi, turned into a prolonged stay, and in a short time he had developed a following, including many university students. His monopoly however, would not last because others were to follow him.

In 1928, Mabuni Kenwa retired from the Okinawan police department, sold most of his belongings and at the urging of Jigoro Kano, moved to Tokyo where he planned on teaching his style of Tode. Both Funakoshi and Mabuni had been students of Itosu; however, their styles differed because Mabuni had studied Naha-Te with Kanryo Higaonna. It was due to Mabuni's friendship with Funakoshi, that he decided to teach in Osaka, not Tokyo, thereby avoiding any chance of competition between the two men. It was also during this period that Chojun Miyagi and Choki Motobu both gained notoriety in Japan.

By the beginning of 1924, there were eight established karate clubs in Tokyo, a large number considering the relatively short time the fighting art had been taught in Japan. Much of the reason for Karate's appeal was precipitated because of its reliance on fist and foot strikes. In a culture whose unarmed fighting had long been dominated by grappling arts like jujutsu, sumo and judo, karate's strategies presented the Japanese with something new and exotic. And while jujutsu contains fist and foot strikes, karate's rapid fire combinations captured the Japanese imagination. Thus, like all things new, it gained a devoted following which made the next decade a time of prosperity for karate. However, prosperity would have its price.

Militaristic Influences

The 1930's were a tumultuous time in Japan which saw radical students and military officers' call for a change in government due to the Tashio era's (1912-26) failed policies at home and abroad. Ultrationalists began stressing Japan's divine right to rulership over all of Asia, and it was through political intrigue that they gained control of the Japanese government. These events culminated on Sunday, May 15, 1932, when a group of young naval officers shot to death Japan's Prime Minister, Inukai Tsuyoshi. Afterwards, Japan came to be ruled by a military government whose domestic policies sought to indoctrinate every man, woman and child with a martial ethos. By 1936, all school children were required to undergo compulsory military training, and war with China would erupt in 1937, thereby increasing anti-Chinese sentiments in Japan. The next eight years marked a dark time in the country's history, one where no institution escaped the influence of Japanese military fascism. The Dai Nippon Butokukai, which regulated the practice of all martial arts in Japan, proved no exception to this rule and eventually helped channel the militaristic policies into karate.

In 1933, the Butokukai officially recognized Karate, thereby placing it on equal footing with Judo and Kendo. For the Okinawans, this was a great honor, but the Butokukai's acceptance had stipulations. One was that the ideogram for tode (China Hand) be replaced with Karate-do, denoting empty hand or empty handed way, a change first promoted by Gichin Funakoshi who felt the art had long since metamorphosed into a Japanese endeavor. Other stipulations included the wearing of uniforms, use of the kyu-dan ranking structure, regimented teaching formats and that competitions, like those held in Judo and Kendo, be incorporated into karate.

The Japanese sought not to preserve Tode the fighting art, but to use the new karate as a tool for developing strong bodies and militaristic mindsets. For not only did the Butokukai's stipulations standardize the practice of karate, but they also mirrored the soldier's lifestyle where uniforms are worn, a person is judged by his or her rank and the individual's identity is directly linked to the group's agenda. Soon after this development, karate's competitive elements became more prevalent, a trend not too surprising considering the ultra-nationalistic policies of the day, for as Richard Sipes wrote about cultures and their inclination for combative sports, "Such sports are components of combative culture themes, and since warlike societies are widespread so are combative sports. This infers some propensity for consistency in group cognitive and behavior patterns but such consistency perhaps can best be explained as an outgrowth of group interaction mechanics and requirements. It need not reflect any innate propensity in the individual human" (Sipes, *War, Sports, Aggression*, 1973). Thus, the Butokukai's recognition affected karate not only philosophically, but physically, as well.⁽⁴⁾

Prior to karate's introduction to Japan, kumite (fighting) and kata bunkai (application) had gone hand in hand. Kumite was the practice of a sequence of techniques found within

the kata by two people at arms length. This encompassed body shifting, sticky hands, trapping, throwing, elbowing, kneeling, punching, as well as killing and crippling techniques. Much like a two party conversation where words are freely exchanged, so too was it in traditional kumite where one technique would negate another, thereby leading to variations of specific bunkai.

By 1936 University karate clubs in Japan were routinely meeting to exchange ideas, compare kata and spar. Sparring usually consisted of two forms, *jiyu-kumite* (free sparring) and *jiyu-ippou-kumite* (one step free sparring). Before this time there had been no competitive elements in karate, but with the introduction of free sparring (*jiyu-kumite*) and one step free sparring (*jiyu-ippou-kumite*), karate began mirroring kendo competitions where contestants fought in a square ring, all the while trying to strike their opponent with a decisive technique.

The new “competitive innovations” resulted in the modern karate-ka fighting at longer ranges, moving in linear patterns due to the ring’s box like shape, and concentrating on singular techniques which requires that each point scored be announced. Although physically demanding, it is a style of competition that leaves little room for counter punching, effective foot- fist combinations, slipping, bobbing or weaving since the most popular strategy is to rush in on a straight line and score a single point.

Many of these alterations were first instituted by Gichin Funakoshi’s son, Yoshitaka Funakoshi, who had followed his father to Japan. Yoshitaka sought to make karate as popular as Judo and Kendo; therefore, he introduced the sidekick, roundhouse kick and back kick, all performed at a height inconsistent with traditional techniques. Nevertheless their colorful nature appealed to a younger audience. He also placed more emphasis on free sparring which made karate’s popularity spread amongst universities. Although Yoshitaka established the foundation upon which modern sport karate was built, his innovations diluted the combat efficiency of the traditional Okinawan fighting arts. Martial Arts historian Donn Draeger noted the effects on karate as a whole when he wrote:

Japanese karate-do in general, under the influence of the younger Funakoshi, eventually became only a quasi-combat form because both weapons and throwing techniques were discarded. Furthermore, many of the techniques developed, if used under the conditions of serious combat, are reckless and liable to cause serious injury to the user. Nevertheless, because the execution of techniques in the JKA style requires the exponent commit his body fully in either attack or defense, this style produces a forceful action with a tremendous appeal to energetic young people. It is a style well suited to competition. Thus the JKA style has affected almost all sects of karate-do, literally forcing them to follow similar patterns of technique if they wish to attract new members and keep pace with the growing popularity of the JKA sport style (Draeger, *Modern Budo Bujutsu*, p.134).

Despite the combative deficiencies noted by Draeger, karate's 'sport influences' remained, resulting in the omission of many traditional strategies from the fighting art owing to rules governing competition. The dialogue of technique was lost, leading to the belief that karate encompassed only striking with the hands and feet when as much as fifty percent, if not more, of its traditional strategies involved joint locks and throwing techniques. Grappling was not an entity apart from traditional karate; rather, it was an integral part of it. Similarly the fighting arts traditional range of combat was at arms length, but this too was overlooked.

The irony was that Chojun Miyagi had experimented with full contact fighting in 1930 but omitted it from his teachings given a lack of suitable protective gear. Had adequate safety equipment, which facilitated medium to full contact fighting, been available in 1930, then the inclusion of free sparring within karate's training repertoire might have been conducted at closer ranges, resulting in a dialogue of technique being kept. This practice would have complemented traditional methods of practice instead of creating an identity crisis as to whether karate was a sport or a system of self defense.

As karate's fame spread among Japanese universities, it came to be practiced by a generation of fighters who, transfixed by its competitive elements, looked upon karate as a sport more so than as a system of self-defense. Gichin Funakoshi expressed his concern about the growing sport tendencies, writing:

Sparring (kumite) is a form used to apply offense and defensive techniques, practiced in the kata, under realistic conditions, in which by prearrangement between participants one applies offensive and the other defensive techniques. It might be difficult for a spirited young man to understand the purpose of kata, so he will find it interesting after gaining some proficiency in the kata to practice sparring if he can find an appropriate partner and a suitable training area. However, it must be emphasized that sparring does not exist apart from the kata but for the practice of kata, so naturally there should be no corrupting influence on one's kata from sparring practice. When one becomes enthusiastic about sparring, there is a tendency for his kata to become bad. Karate, to the very end, should be practiced with kata as principle method and sparring as a supporting method” (Funakoshi, *Karate-Do Kyohan*, p.211).

Despite Funakoshi's warning, this trend continued and as its popularity grew, the word karate became synonymous with a grouping of sub-styles which exhibited strong competitive elements. This led many individuals to proclaim karate a sport, while others viewed it as a system of self-defense. And with the passage of time this division of identity grew stronger, thereby confusing the goals of traditional combative karate with those of modern sport karate.

Chapter 5

One Fighting Art Divided by Different Personalities

Throughout history mankind has sought ways to classify, catalogue and transmit knowledge so that he can better understand the world and human experience. This quest has not been an easy one, for both knowledge and experience are difficult to capture and their transmission from one person to another can be a daunting task. The methods used to accomplish this goal are as various as our personalities since the matter is often based on individual perspective. Thus, knowledge takes on a distinct character, yet, is never captured complete, and this often makes its attainment an unspoken transaction. In the words of Joseph Campbell, this “has been the chief function of much of the mythological lore and ritual practice of our species to carry the mind, feelings, and powers of action of the individual across the critical thresholds from two decades of infancy to adulthood, and from old age to death; to supply the sign stimuli adequate to release the life energies of the one who is no longer what he was for his new task, the new phase, in the manner appropriate to the well-being of the group. And so we find, on one hand, as a constant factor in these ‘rites of passage,’ the inevitable, and therefore universal, requirements of the human individual at the particular junctures, and on the other hand, as a cultural variable, the historically conditioned requirements and beliefs of the group. This gives the interesting quality of seeming to be ever the same, though ever changing, to the kaleidoscope of world mythology, which may charm our poets and artists but is a nightmare for the mind that seeks to classify. And yet, with a steady eye, even the phantasmagoria of a nightmare can be catalogued-to a degree” (Campbell, *Primitive Mythology*, p.61).

The process Dr. Campbell describes (when applied to a fighting art) of identifying and cataloguing techniques, which creates a systematic form of fighting, is a task of immense proportions. For not all combat is performed in a conscious state of mind. The impulse to survive drives one in the heat of combat to perform instinctively, not consciously. And while our instinctive actions are the most effective, they are by far the hardest to replicate. They cannot be taught, only realized through constant training by the fighter, who then imbues a fighting art with its own identity. Hence, it is not the system that gives birth to the fighter, but the fighter who gives birth to the system, which when transmitted to another individual, is used in a similar fashion, but with different realizations gained. This process is the essence from which traditional karate was born because it is the fighter at odds with external forces who gives birth to a system.

Despite similar backgrounds and training, no two people are identical therefore no two fighting styles will be alike unless they are replicated in a mechanical fashion. This perhaps is what distinguishes the classical karate masters, such as Itosu, Miyagi, Motobu, Mabuni and others of their era, from many today. For the early karate masters possessed the ability to create a philosophical and technical doctrine designed to meet both their personal

needs and those of the environment in which they fought. Some were able to pass on these traditions in a structured manner while others were not. However, all of their teachings began with the individual and from there progressed outward.

The men most responsible for the story of modern karate came from a rural agrarian culture that had little contact with the industrialized world until the 20th century. The agrarian lifestyle is often a harsh, physically demanding existence that requires much patience. For this reason it was the individual with his skill, knowledge and experience that made society function. Therefore, the master-apprentice relationship was widely used to transmit knowledge and skills from one generation to the next. This process required many years of training by the apprentice before he reached a level of sophistication considered acceptable by his master and the community at large. Any deviations from this custom resulted in the apprentice being an outcast. Quality was based on how well someone executed a particular task, not how many tasks one muddled through. This lifestyle greatly influenced the manner in which the Okinawan fighting arts were practiced. It was not an option for the early practitioners, but the only way they knew. And since art mirrors life, so was it in their training.

Within this tradition was an evolutionary process that permitted the fighter to progress from the most infant state in training, to a level at which any technique executed was a spontaneous expression. This allowed the fighter to transcend all systematic boundaries and make the fighting art a reflection of his own personality. Consequently, it is little wonder that the concept of style, as we know it today, has small meaning to karate until after its being introduced to the industrialized world and why many of its leading practitioners referred to the fighting art simply as *Te* (Hand), *tode* (China Hand) or *bu* (Martial Arts). Noted martial arts author Harry Cook, remarked about this process: “In classical martial arts a practitioners development is seen to go through three stages, known as *Shu*, *Ha* and *Ri*. *Shu* is where you learn the method exactly. *Ha* is where you personalize the style to some extent, and *Ri* is the stage of transcendence. At this point everything about the system is spontaneous and natural. What I see in modern karate is that the *Shu* stage is very common. *Ha* exists but is viewed with some suspicion by many seniors, because it is viewed as a deviation from the norm, while *Ri* cannot co-exist in a group where ‘standardization’ of all aspects of training is regarded both as normal and desirable” (Cook, *Dragon Times*, Volume 16, 7).

Although much emphasis is placed on maintaining the style or ryu-ha’s teachings, today this often results in a standardization process which prevents the karate-ka from reaching the *Ha* and *Ri* levels Cook wrote about. Sadly, this post modern, mechanistic way of interpretation goes against the grain of traditional karate where the concept of fighting style was a reflection of one’s unique personality. As Richard Kim observed about its pre-Japan days, “Prior to this period, karate was not systematized as we know it. It was generally called kara-te or to-de (Tang Hand). The various styles of kara-te were simply named after each master who taught his own interpretation of the art” (Kim, *Weaponless Warriors*, 43).

Despite that karate's earliest traditions evolved from individual styles of fighting, regional tastes did influence karate's development. The towns of Shuri, Naha and Tomari served as general, but not exclusive, indicators of martial strategies. Shuri practitioners were noted for natural upright movements, Naha exponents preferred steady, rooted movements, while Tomari stylists embraced both. Moreover, since each town was within walking distance of another, strategies were transmitted between fighters. With the growth of karate's popularity in Japan, each town's fighting style became an absolute tradition, hence the names Shuri-Te, Naha-Te and Tomari-Te. This was initiated by the Okinawans during Kano Jigoro's visit in 1927, and continued thereafter as a way to help the Japanese understand the fighting arts lineage, while at the same time downplaying its eclectic nature.

The story of karate, as initially told, was through its practitioners, and in the beginning it was a very personal tale. Therefore, in order to understand how the various styles of karate came into existence we must examine the men whose teachings between 1879 and 1935 provided the foundation upon which karate rests.

Bushi Matsumura

“The Three kinds of fighting arts are: 1. those of court instructors 2. nominal styles 3. the true fighting arts.” - *Bushi Matsumura* ⁽⁵⁾

Perhaps one of the strongest influences on the Shuri traditions was Bushi Matsumura Sokon (1809-1901). Both scholar and fighter, Matsumura was a renaissance man who believed in achieving balance between physical and intellectual pursuits. Matsumura who learned Te as a youth, and was a student of Tode Sakugawa, served as a bodyguard to three Okinawan Kings: Sho Ko, Sho Iku and Sho Tai. Twice he visited Fuzhou, China and studied boxing in addition to learning Jigen Ryu Kenjutsu in Japan.

During Matsumura's life, the Okinawan social hierarchy revolved around three base levels: the royalty, the privileged class (*Shizoku*) and the commoners (*heimin*). The title of Bushi was not a rank in the Okinawan social hierarchy, but was instead bestowed upon a person for having reached a balance between fighting prowess and intellectual pursuits, thereby becoming the scholar warrior, a standing highly regarded in both Asia and Europe at the time. Because of Matsumura's achievements he was awarded the title of Bushi for his pen and sword were of equal measure. This dual emphasis is seen in his makimono where he states there are three pathways to the fighting arts practice:

1 - Those practiced by scholars, or courtly nobles, for aesthetic reasons where much debate is held over various strategies and techniques but little effort is made to understand combative applications.

2 - Nominal styles and practitioners, who have no depth, are not consistent in their training but still boast about their fighting prowess. Matsumura

felt these individuals did grievous harm to both the fighting arts and those they interacted with.

3 - The genuine traditions practiced by individuals who sought to cultivate technical expertise and their inner realms through diligent practice. Such people's dedication is unswerving, yet they rarely, if ever, speak of their fighting prowess.

Matsumura was a true seeker of the martial path and believed in the cultivation of both mind and body through one's training. He wrote about this process "In finding the way we gain a deeper understanding of things, build strength from weakness and make our feelings more sincere, become virtuous and even administer our own affairs more effectively, and in doing so make our home a more peaceful place—a precept which can also apply to our country or the entire world. This then is a complete study and it is called *jukyō*." (Nagamine, *Okinawa's Great Masters*, 21)

Through his training Bushi Matsumura transcended realms the dilettante can only imagine and, by doing so, was able to redefine the manner in which existing traditions were practiced. Today, many consider Bushi Matsumura to be the grandfather of the Shorin ryu traditions, but his influences extend to all styles of karate.

Itosu Anko

"Master Itosu never once found reason to fight another person. He was a man of great dignity who deeply respected humanity." - *Shoshin Nagamine*.⁽⁶⁾

A strong, barrel-chested man, known for his powerful punches, Itosu Anko (1831- 1915) was born into an upper-class family. He learned Tode as a youth and eventually became one of Bushi Matsumura's most respected students. Itosu, most noted for introducing Tode into the Okinawan school systems, also developed the Pinan kata, designed to help beginning students become acquainted with karate's basic techniques. Although concerned primarily with Shuri-based systems, Itosu's Pinan concept did sway other karate systems into developing their own beginner's forms used to bridge the gap between Kihon and advanced koryu kata. Seikichi Toguchi writing about this concept and how it was incorporated into Goju-ryu karate stated that,

Although a master of Goju-ryu style (Naha-te), Master Chojun Miyagi wanted to study karate more completely. He visited the most respected master of Shuri-te, Master Anko Itosu, and asked for instruction. Master Itosu responded by saying, 'You are a top disciple of Master Higashionna and you have mastered Naha-te techniques. You don't need to study with me. If you watch my techniques, you will see what I mean.'

Master Miyagi persisted, however, and often visited Master Itosu to study Shuri-te. Master Itosu did not teach Master Itosu did not teach Master Miyagi physical techniques; rather,

he taught the theory of techniques. Master Itosu's influence may be seen in Master Miyagi's Hookiyu Kata where the combination of hard and soft (as in Gekisai No.1 and No. 2) reflect Shuri-te's movements. (Toguchi, *Okinawan Goju-Ryu*, 16)

Itosu's drive to have Tode become part of the Okinawan school systems educational curriculum would be a major stepping stone in the transformation of Tode/Karate from an art passed on by one individual to a group exercise that could be used to develop better health and diligent attitudes in Okinawa youths. It was with this ambition that Itosu wrote the ten precepts of karate which were to be a guideline for achieving the intended results. They are as follows:

Tode did not develop from the way of Buddhism or Confucianism. In the recent past Shorin-ryu and Shorei-ryu were brought over from China. They both have similar strong points, so, before there are any changes, I should like to write them down.

1 - Tode is primarily for the benefit of health. In order to protect one's parents or one's master, it is proper to attack a foe regardless of one's life. Never attack a lone adversary. If one meets a villain or a ruffian one shouldn't use tode but simply parry and step aside.

2 - The purpose of Tode is to make the body hard like stones and iron; hands and feet should be used like points of arrows; hearts should be strong and brave. If children were to practice tode from their elementary school days, they would be well prepared for military service. When Wellington and Napoleon met they discussed the point that 'tomorrow's victory will come from today's playground.'

3 - Tode cannot be learned quickly. Like a slow moving bull, that eventually walks a thousand miles, if one studies seriously everyday, in three or four years one will understand what tode is about. The shape of one's bones will change.

Those who study as follows will discover the essence of Tode:

4 - In tode the hands and feet are important so they should be trained thoroughly on the makiwara. In doing so drop your shoulders, open your lungs take hold of your strength, grip the floor with your feet and sink your intrinsic energy to your lower abdomen. Practice with each arm one or two thousand times.

5 - When practicing Tode stances make sure your back is straight, drop your shoulders, take your strength and put it in your legs, stand firmly and put the intrinsic energy in your lower abdomen, the top and bottom of which must be held together tightly.

6 - The external techniques of Tode should be practiced, one by one, many times. Because these techniques are passed on by word of mouth, take the trouble to learn explanations and decide when and in what context it would be possible to use them. Go in, counter, release; is the rule of torite.

7 - You must decide whether tode is for cultivating a healthy body or for enhancing your duty.

8 - During practice you should imagine you are on a battlefield. When blocking and striking make the eyes glare, drop the shoulders and harden the body. Now block the enemy's punch and strike. Always practice with this spirit so that, when on the real battlefield, you will naturally be prepared.

9 - Do not overexert yourself during practice because the intrinsic energy will rise up, your face and eyes will turn red and your body will be harmed. Be careful.

10 - In the past many of those who have mastered tode have lived to a ripe old age. This is because tode aids the development of the bones and sinews, it helps the digestive organs and is good for the circulation of the blood. Therefore, from now on, tode should become the foundation of all sports lessons from elementary schools onward. If this is put into practice there will, I think, be many men who can win against ten aggressors.

The reason for stating all this is that it is my opinion that all students at the Okinawa Prefectural Teachers Training College should practice tode, so that when they graduate from here they can teach children in the schools exactly as I have taught them. Within ten years time tode will spread all over Okinawa and to Japan. This will be a great asset to our militaristic society. I hope you will carefully study the words I have written here.

Anko Itosu 1908 (Bishop, *Okinawan Karate*, 90)

When reading Itosu's ten precepts, the reader observes that he was establishing guidelines for karate's practice through which Okinawan and Japanese youths could develop healthy bodies and a militaristic mindset. The irony of this, however, is that although a very intelligent man, Itosu, in all probability, never fathomed the killing power armies of his day had. And he most certainly never envisioned the military might that would be used to quell Japanese aggression during the Second World War.

Itosu understood the role a strong martial ethos played during hand-to-hand combat, but by the time karate gained nationwide popularity in Japan, hand- to- hand combat was a rare occurrence on the modern battlefield. Unfortunately, this quasi-martial spirit, as noble as it may have been, often led to tragedy when used during combat. Gichin Funakoshi described the fate that befell many of his students:

Sensei', I would often hear a young man say as he knelt before me, 'I have been drafted, and I'm off to serve my country and my emperor.' Every day I would hear my students, often more than one, report to me in this fashion. They had been strenuously practicing karate day after day in preparation for hand-to-hand encounters with an unmet enemy, and they believed that they were ready. Indeed, I was told that some officers instructed their men, if they were unable to carry a rifle or a sword, to charge the enemy with their bare hands. This came to be known as a 'karate charge.' Of course many of my students died in battle-so many, alas, I lost count of them. (Funakoshi, *Karate-Do My Way of Life*, 88)

Had the Japanese government not become so ultra-militaristic then karate may have remained a practice which, despite worldwide popularity, embraced a spirit similar to that found in Tai Chi or Aikido, instead of the militaristic overtones it did. This was not the case, but it does leave one wondering whether Itosu Anko would have chosen the path he did, had the future been predicted to him. Unfortunately history can never be rewritten; at best it can only be examined and learned from.⁽⁷⁾

Kanryo Higaonna – Chojun Miyagi

“Being expelled from school did not concern me, but I was terrified of hearing the words from Kanryo Sensei, ‘You need not come to the dojo tomorrow’”. - *Chojun Miyagi*⁽⁸⁾

Although Te was undoubtedly practiced in Naha prior to the 19th century, its rebirth and compilation into a systematic teaching is accredited to Kanryo Higaonna (1853-1915). Born during the same year that Commodore Perry landed on Okinawa, Kanryo was the son of a merchant who owned several junks and made a living transporting people and goods to outlying Ryukyuan islands.

By the time he was ten, Kanryo had begun helping his father, and it was during this period that he talked with political envoys and merchants who told him about Chinese boxing. These stories, along with his father's own accounts, excited Kanryo, who by his early 20's had saved enough money to study boxing. Soon after he had received permission from the Okinawan Government, Kanryo traveled to China where he began training with Ryu Ryu Ko, a well-known boxer in the Fuzhou area.

The first years Kanryo Higaonna spent in China were unpleasant ones because he did not speak the local dialect, and being far from Okinawa, homesickness, no doubt, dampened his spirits. Kanryo was determined, however, and his perseverance eventually paid off. Initially his training centered on body conditioning and basic techniques, but with the passage of time and after gaining Ryu Ryu Ko's trust, he was taught advanced kata and weaponry. Higaonna proved to be a diligent student, one whose boxing skills gained him much respect in the Fuzhou area.

Returning home to Okinawa, somewhere between the years of 1881-1885, Higaonna once again took up the family business and began sailing the Okinawan waters. It was on one such trip that he met his wife. Family life dictated that Higaonna stop his travels, which he did, and this hiatus enabled him to begin teaching in the Naha area. Though a gentleman, Higaonna's teachings were severe with much emphasized placed on body conditioning and Sanchin kata. It was not uncommon for students to pass out during class; however, it was not until the basics had been mastered that Higaonna would allow a student to learn more advanced techniques and kata.

With the introduction of tode to the Okinawan schools, Kanryo taught both in the schools and in his home. The teaching curriculums differed, though, because that which was presented in the school system was taught as a means of physical fitness and character development, while Kanryo's teachings at home were of a combative nature encompassing all aspects of Tode.

Kanro Higaonna's style of fighting was transmitted to Chojun Miyagi (1888-1953) who, in turn, became Okinawa's leading Naha-te practitioner. Born into a wealthy merchant family, Miyagi was a humble man whose integrity was beyond reproach. Legendary Gojuryu practitioner, Morio Higaonna, tells in his book *The History of Karate* the reason for Miyagi's final visit to Japan:

Due to an unpleasant incident, Chojun Miyagi visited Koyoto for the last time in 1942. After this visit he wrote a letter to Yasuhiro Konishi requesting that he go in his place to any future Butokukai events.

On this final visit a group, which included members of the Butokukai and other martial artists, invited Miyagi Sensei to dine at a restaurant in Kyoto. As they sat and talked after the meal, one member of the group passed a thick envelope containing money to Chojun Sensei. As he passed it the man said, '*ippitsu onegai shimasu.*' Ippitsu meaning 'a brush stroke.' This was clearly a request for Miyagi to grant members of this group black belt ranks. Miyagi Sensei who in any case disliked the concept of ranks, immediately pushed the envelope away stating that he could not comply with the request. He was greatly angered by this and returned to Okinawa never to visit Kyoto (or Japan) again, (Higaonna, *History of Karate*, 89-90).

It was with such honor and dignity that Chojun Miyagi taught karate and conducted his life. He would make no compromises and preferred the small confines of quality to the larger realms of quantity.

Miyagi was 14 years old when he began studying with Kanryo Higaonna. A gifted athlete and accomplished sumo wrestler, Miyagi excelled under Higaonna's personal tutelage, advancing from technique to technique and kata to kata. Miyagi's devotion to training was unswerving, and he soon became one of Higaonna's most valued students. During his two years of military service (1910-1912), Miyagi practiced judo and taught karate to his

fellow soldiers. After his enlistment ended he returned to Okinawa and once more resumed his training with Higaonna. Before dying in 1915, Higaonna encouraged Miyagi to go to China and study boxing there, just as he had done. Miyagi did as he was advised, journeying to Fuzhou China, where he conducted extensive research into the style of boxing Higaonna had imported to Okinawa.

With Kanryo Higaonna's death, Chojun Miyagi became Okinawa's leading Naha-te practitioner. With this new position, his training became relentless, encompassing most of the day during which he would lift heavy rocks, run, pound his arms and hands into sand and practice Sanchin endlessly.



Chojun Miyagi

In 1926 Miyagi established the Karate Kenkyu Club, along with Chomo Hanashiro of the Shuri Te lineage, Kenwa Mabuni, later day founder of Shito-ryu and Choyo Motobu, the eldest brother of Choki Motobu. The club's purpose was to unite the karate community so that karate would be preserved for future generations. Although staffed by some of Okinawa's premier karate-ka, the club disbanded in 1929 because of internal strife between its instructors. Afterwards, from 1929 until the Second World War's outbreak, Miyagi taught at various locations on Okinawa and at several universities in Japan.

In 1933 Miyagi registered his fighting art with the Butokukai under the name Goju-ryu, or hard-soft style. Though ironically, he seldom used the name, preferring instead to call his system either *bu* (martial) or *te* (hand). Miyagi's reluctance to use a formal name is a reflection upon his being concerned with karate's development process, more so than the regimentation of the fighting art itself.

The war years were hard on Miyagi, and during the 1945 invasion, he lost many of his family and friends, in addition to the volumes of research he had collected on the history and practice of the Okinawan fighting arts. His most senior student, Jinan Shinzato, who was to be Goju-ryu's successor, was killed during the battle for the island, leaving Miyagi in a quandary about Goju-ryu's future. Prominent Okinawan Goju-ryu practitioner, Anichi Miyagi, stated about the war and its effects on Goju-ryu that "The war changed everything including the culture that created karate and the lives of the Okinawan people so it may be impossible for it to continue exactly as it was" (Buchwald, *Interview with Anichi Miyagi*, 7). This was to be a turning point in karate's history for since its introduction to Japan, and particularly after the war, differences between the systems practiced on Okinawa and those practiced in Japan had become apparent. The influence of Chinese boxing on Okinawan karate is not as strong on Japanese styles of karate. This philosophical difference also extended to the practice of Okinawan Kobudo, with some Japanese karate-ka firmly embracing the 'empty-hand' ideogram while others did not, preferring instead to include

Okinawan weapons as part of their teaching curriculum, or else incorporate traditional Japanese weaponry in their place. All told, these cultural preferences helped each system of karate (Okinawan and Japanese) to manifest its own identity, while at the same time retain strong similarities, as seen with Goju-ryu's proliferation in Japan.

Although Chojun Miyagi only taught in Japan for short periods of time, his karate gained a large following due to the efforts of Gogen Yamaguchi. Nicknamed "The Cat," Yamaguchi was a charismatic individual who practiced Shinto, delved into mysticism and incorporated Yoga into his karate training. Although it is hard to discern exactly how much time Yamaguchi spent training with Chojun Miyagi, the former was by the beginning of the Second World War, the senior Goju-ryu practitioner in Japan.

During the war Yamaguchi, who was a government official, spent much of his time in Manchuria and was captured there in 1945 by Russian troops. Following his capture, Yamaguchi spent two years in a Russian labor camp, returning to Japan in 1947. By 1950, Yamaguchi had established the All Japan Karate-do Goju-kai, which was popular among university students. Although retaining the same kata as that practiced on Okinawa, Japanese Goju emphasized movements which were more conducive to the tournament arena. However, the emphasis on sport contrasted with Chojun Miyagi's way of Goju-ryu, which stressed rooted movements, lower kicks and was taught primarily at his house to small groups of people, as opposed to the large college audiences in Japan.

During his life Miyagi awarded no dan rankings (black belts) because he felt the practice detrimental to both karate and those who practiced it. For him a person's character was just as important, if not more so, than their fighting prowess. Miyagi's training philosophy was of a holistic nature, encompassing both the student's physical and mental well-being. He died in 1953, but his legacy lives on today through the dedication, humbleness and dignity he displayed in both life and karate.

Choki Motobu

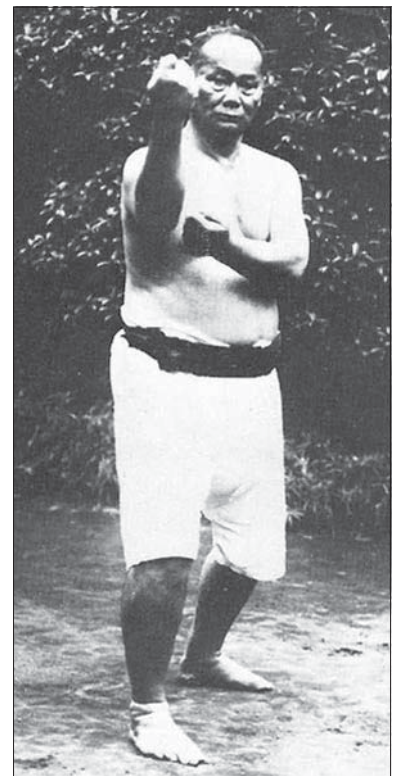
"Once a man acquires the knowledge of Karate-Jutsu, he will protect himself by defeating his enemies." -*Choki Motobu* ⁽⁹⁾

Considered a brawler by many of his peers Choki Motobu (1871-1944), nonetheless was a tactician *parexcellence* who developed much of his skill in Naha's red light district where he participated in numerous street fights. And while training with many instructors, two of the most prominent being Kosaku Matsumora and Itosu Ankoh, Motobu never bound himself to one sensei but instead developed a breadth of martial expertise upon which he placed his own stamp.

The third son of Chomo Udon Motobu, Choki was born into a privileged Okinawan family. Reports vary, but many historians believe that it was the first-born son, Choyu, who received the better education. However, despite this setback, his family's wealth allowed

Choki to devote himself entirely to the study of Tode. Determined and motivated, he would spend much of the day striking a makiwara, training for strength, practicing techniques or testing his skills in a street fight.

Many legends surround Motobu, some claiming he was between six and seven feet tall, hence the reason for his impressive streak of victories. Motobu, actually, was of normal Okinawan height but of a robust build, no doubt the result of constant weight training. Other stories claim that Motobu knew only one kata and had very little appreciation for its practice. This too is erroneous. Motobu's respect for kata is seen when he explains their self defense value to Shoshin Nagamine, stating that "The techniques of kata were never developed to be used against a professional fighter, in the arena or on the battlefield. They were, however, most effective against someone who had no idea of the strategy being used to counter their aggressive behavior." Motobu goes on to say, "In spite of a street encounter never being the same, the principles of the kata never vary, however. Thus one must learn how they are applied and how to bend with the winds of adversity," (Nagamine, *Okinawa's Great Masters*, 96).



Choki Motobu

Motobu's fame skyrocketed because of a fight he was involved in after moving to Osaka, Japan. In 1925, *King Magazine* ran a story about Motobu knocking out a European boxer "identity unknown" during a no holds bout that took place in Kyoto four years prior. Motobu, who had moved to Japan before Gichin Funakoshi, was not as successful as Funakoshi in his attempts to teach karate. This created animosity between the two men, compounded when the magazine showed Funakoshi, not Motobu, knocking out the westerner. In time the relationship between the two deteriorated to the point of slander, and their differences were never resolved.

However, despite his personal conflicts, with such notables as Hironori Ohtsuka of Wado-ryu fame and Shoshin Nagamine of Matsubayashi-ryu as his pupils, Motobu's philosophies were strongly felt in both Okinawan and Japanese karate circles. A master of kumite, Motobu emphasized close range fighting, kicking below the waist, fighting with both hands at chest level and moving into an opponent to upset his mental composure. These aggressive trademarks of Motobu's fighting style were a result of his strategies having been tested in street altercations. Writing about the influence Motobu had upon him and Matsubayashi-ryu, Shoshin Nagamine stated that,

After I had personal instruction from Motobu and learned kumite from him late in his life, my old ideas on kumite were changed. I was inspired to create new ideas, based on the instruction of this teacher, who learned kumite through his own experience in actual

fighters. I have always been encouraged by his way of life sustained by his strong will and devotion to karate-do.

I owe a great deal of what I have achieved in the course of my career as a karateman to Motobu's karate-do and his teaching. Without him, I could never have developed seven kata of kumite, which are the basic forms of kumite in Matsubayashi-ryu. (Nagamine, *Okinawa's Great Masters*, 46)

Motobu believed that the student could grasp karate's intricate framework only if its status as a combative art was maintained. He was a traditionalist in the sense that he sought to preserve not the structured teaching formats, wearing of uniforms or the kyu-dan ranking systems, but instead, karate's essence as a fighting art. Without which he feared Karate would become an empty practice suitable only for esthetic purposes. Ironically, although many people tried to discredit his theories while he was alive, history has proven Choki Motobu correct. It is not the external trappings which make karate a fighting art, but the dedicated practitioner who constantly perfects their skills. ⁽¹⁰⁾

Gichin Funakoshi

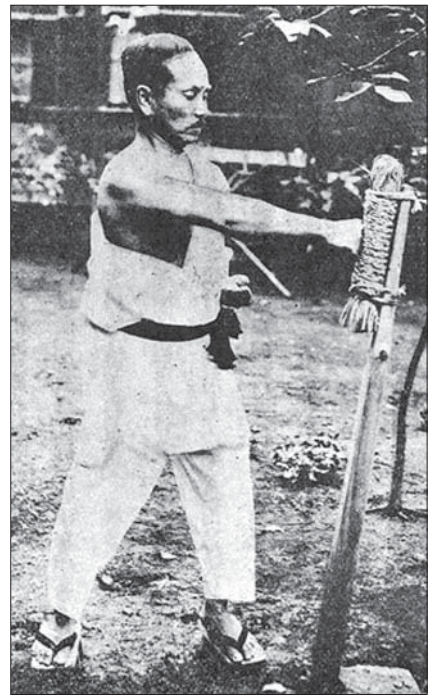
“Each and every punch must be made with the power of your entire body behind it, with the feeling of destroying your opponent with a single blow” - *Gichin Funakoshi* ⁽¹¹⁾

Born prematurely into an upper-class Shuri family, Gichin Funakoshi (1868-1957) was never expected to live out his childhood. However, due to the care given him by his parents and grandparents, Funakoshi's health improved to the point that he was eventually able to attend primary school. There he befriended the son of Azato Anko who introduced him to his father. Funakoshi described Azato Anko “a most amazing man who was one of Okinawa's greatest experts in the art of karate” (Funakoshi, *My Way of Life*, 3). Funakoshi was accepted by Azato as a student and soon proved himself to be a dedicated novice. Making a long walk, by lantern, each night to Azato's house there Funakoshi would receive instruction which proved to be very demanding. Writing about this time in his latter years Funakoshi recalled that “Night after night, often in the backyard of the Azato house as the master looked on, I would practice kata (‘formal exercise’) time and again week after week, sometimes month after month, until I had mastered it to my teacher's satisfaction. This constant repetition of a single kata was grueling, often exasperating and on occasion humiliating. More than once I had to lick the dust on the floor of the dojo or in the Azato backyard. But practice was strict, and I was never permitted to move on to another kata until Azato was convinced that I had satisfactorily understood the one I had been working on” (Ibid. p.6). It would be through Azato that Funakoshi would come to know, and eventually train with, Itosu Anko.

In keeping with his family's upper class (shizoku) traditions, Gichin Funakoshi was taught the four Chinese classics, five Confucian classics and calligraphy as a youth. This classical reparation prompted him, around the age of twenty-one, to become a school teacher, a

career he would pursue for the next three decades, one which also allowed him to remain in the Shuri-Naha area and train with Azato, Itosu and several other prominent karate-ka of the day.

In 1914, Funakoshi was member to a group of experts who gave karate demonstrations in both Shuri and Naha in an attempt to increase the fighting arts popularity on Okinawa. Later, in 1917, he demonstrated karate for the first time at the Butokuden, and then in 1921 he gave another display for Japan's crown prince at Shuri Castle. In 1922, Funakoshi made his second visit to Japan where he presented karate to the Japanese Athletic Exhibition in Tokyo. His second stay was to have been a brief one, were it not for Jigoro Kano, Judo's founder, asking him to perform at the kodokan. Funakoshi's showing at the kodokan was a success, prompting him to remain in Japan teaching karate as his new career.



Gichin Funakoshi

Though a retired school teacher, Funakoshi did not achieve prosperity as a karate instructor at once. He initially worked odd jobs and at one point even persuaded his dormitory cook to take karate in exchange for a discount on meals. However, his popularity eventually grew, and many of Japan's societal elite endorsed his 1922 publication of *Ryukyu Kempo Karate*, their accolades a tribute not only to his physical skills, but his to education and knowledge of Japanese society as well.

Funakoshi initially presented Karate in Japan as a means of self-defense, a way to perfect one's character and a way to stay in shape. However, by 1925, a more structured format had evolved in his teachings which included sparring, the use of Kihon (basic techniques) and the renaming of kata to reflect Japanese overtures. Over the course of time some have speculated that sparring and Kihon were incorporated by Funakoshi to appease the growing number of college students practicing karate. Others say it was because the Butokukai wanted to organize karate in a similar fashion to Judo and Kendo. In all likelihood, it was probably a combination of these two forces, which, along with Funakoshi's own analytical mind, and the decades he had spent teaching school, made him seek an elementary way through which he could present his karate to a large audience. Thus, the changes he made.

Nor was Funakoshi hesitant to give his karate a Japanese image, as others were at the time. He preferred using the kara ideogram in place of Tode, stating in his book *Karate-do Kyohan* that, "I found it difficult to believe that 'Chinese hand(s)' was the correct term to describe Okinawan karate as it has evolved over the centuries. Then, a few years after I came to Tokyo, I had an opportunity to express my disagreement with this traditional way of writing. It came about when Keio University formed a Karate research group, and I was able then to suggest that the art be renamed Dai Nippon Kempo Karate-Do ('Great Japan

Fist-Method Empty- Hands Way’), making use of the character for ‘empty’ rather than that for ‘Chinese’ (Funakoshi, *Karate-do Kyohan*, 34-35). Although first used by Chomo Hanshiro (1869-1945), it was Gichin Funakoshi who popularized the name Karate-Do. And despite the translation of Karate-Do as “empty-hand way”, empty in itself does not mean without weapons. Rather, it implies the purging of all egotistical tendencies from oneself through which an individual finds the Tao, or path of essential goodness, that lies within all of us.

Through his actions Gichin Funakoshi contributed much to his native fighting art’s growth, both in Japan and abroad. He also played a leading role in karate’s post-war popularity without which, many, who practice the art today, would have little knowledge of it. He died in 1957, a dignified man who had inspired many and achieved legendary status for his dedication to karate.

Kenwa Mabuni

“There are no styles of karate-do, just varying interpretations of its principles.”
-*Kenwa Mabuni* ⁽¹²⁾

Considered by many of his peers to be a karate virtuoso, Kenwa Mabuni (1889-1952) is perhaps the least recognized, but most knowledgeable of those who introduced karate to Japan. Born in Shuri, Okinawa, Mabuni began his karate training with Itosu Anko at age thirteen. Later, as an adult, Mabuni also trained with Kanryo Higaonna, although this relationship was cut short when Mabuni was drafted into the military.

In 1913, Mabuni was discharged from military service and began his career in law enforcement. As a detective Mabuni was able to travel throughout Okinawan training with several legendary fighters, one of whom was Arakaki Seisho. Seisho, a master of White Crane boxing, taught Mabuni weapons and empty-hand strategies that he learned in China. Other prominent fighters Mabuni trained with are Hanashiro Chomo, Sueyoshi Jino, and Yabiku Moden, a recognized kobudo expert.

In 1928 Kenwa Mabuni retired from the police department and moved to Japan where he established karate clubs in Osaka. Mabuni originally called his style of fighting Hanko-ryu, or “half-hard style”, but in 1934 he christened it Shito-ryu. The ideogram *Shito*, honors both Itosu Anko and Kanryo Higaonna, two men who greatly influenced Mabuni’s karate training.

Shito-ryu is an eclectic style of fighting exhibiting both soft and hard methodologies in its teachings, a trait common to most styles of karate. When stylistic boundaries are laid aside, the practice of karate can be categorized into three basic categories: hard form, middle form and soft form. Hard forms rely exclusively upon muscular power and force meeting force action. Middle forms are more pliable than hard forms, and, although relying upon muscular power, they remain fairly relaxed until contact with the opponent is made.

Soft forms, in contrast to the other two, embrace relaxation, mold with an opponent's actions and use muscle tension sparingly.

Karate, initially, is presented as a hard form of fighting which relies exclusively on muscular power. However, through kata practice the student begins developing middle forms which while relying on muscular power, embrace pliability, as the practitioner learns to relax and tense his or her body in conjunction with the kata's breathing patterns. The process is much like peeling an onion where, with each layer stripped away, a deeper portion of the onion is revealed. Consequently, while one kata may be executed uniformly, its essence can exhibit three different characteristics depending upon the skill level of the person performing it. Thus, the more time spent practicing kata, the more aware the karate-ka becomes of his or her body's capabilities, and much like the football running back who, through constantly practicing wind sprints, learns how to both relax and run at the same time, so it is for the karate-ka.

Kenwa Mabuni's extensive knowledge of the Okinawan fighting arts allowed him to incorporate this hard to soft progression into Shito-ryu, reminding us that karate's practice transcends the idea of style. Mabuni died in 1952, recognized as one of karate's leading authorities and most influential figures.



Kenwa Mabuni

Chapter 6

Lost in Translation, the Post War Styles

Gichin Funakoshi, Choki Motobu, Chojun Miyagi, and Kenwa Mabuni are widely regarded as the pioneers of Japanese karate. However, Yabiku Moden, Uechi Kanbun, Sawada Masaru, Nisaburo Miki and other prominent Okinawan karate-ka also traveled to Japan where they too influenced the fighting arts development and subsequently helped give rise to other styles of karate.

While individual preference dictated karate's practice on Okinawa, many who taught it in Japan realized that for karate to be accepted by Japanese society it needed a structured format that provided a historical foundation, standardized methods of training and continuity of instruction. By 1931, these changes were implemented and, in 1933, Karate was officially recognized by the Butokukai. With this came the formation of karate ryu-ha the four earliest being Goju-ryu-Chojun Miyagi: Shotokan-Gichin Funakoshi: Shito-ryu-Kenwa Mabuni and Wado-ryu- Otsuka Hidenori.

A concept that evolved in feudal-era Japan, the martial ryu-ha was developed by a warrior, or experienced practitioner, who compiled proven techniques and strategies into what they considered a complete syllabus of martial knowledge. Consequently one did not join a classical ryu but gained admittance to it and then became immersed in its teachings and camaraderie. Yet despite the presence of a group ethos, each warrior's progression was charted separately within the classical ryu, its goal being to develop competent war fighters through a time consuming process based on integrity and quality. Because of this regimen the classical ryu were living entities, steeped in centuries old traditions, passed down through time from one appointed successor to another, a process leaving no room for offshoot dojos or competing headmasters within the ryu's lineage.

These classical traits were not incorporated into karate despite its practitioners borrowing liberally from the classical systems to enhance their own style of fighting. The modern karate ryu's purpose was, and still is, to make the art accessible to the masses. Whereas the classical ryu are concerned with small groups of students the modern ryu is designed to facilitate multitudes of people. This, in turn, allows one karate ryu to have numerous dojos and hundreds of practitioners at the same time. Likewise, whereas the classical ryu stressed individuality the modern version emphasizes conformity and group cohesion, traits imposed upon karate by prevalent militaristic policies of the day. ⁽¹³⁾

As the modern ryu gained dominance over previous methods based on personal style, the nature of karate became increasingly regimented and group orientated. Overseeing this process was the Butokukai, which before it recognized someone's training as a legitimate style of karate required a standardized teaching syllabus to be present, the instructor deemed qualified and the kyu-dan ranking structure, employed to grade students' progress. While

establishing continuity, this institutionalization divided karate into differing camps, each with its own unique identity. Hence individual styles were compared against one another, instead of being considered interrelated parts that belonged to a larger entity.

Complicating matters even more was a difference in regional teaching styles, for while Japanese karate was regimented, Okinawan styles remained eclectic until after the war. In Japan competitive elements flourished while on Okinawa they were initially downplayed in favor of traditional approaches relying on kata. However, as free sparring became popular in Japan and on Okinawa, the partitions separating the two styles grew less obvious until the post-war period war saw both styles of karate considered as one in the same, a perception brought forth by unknowing westerners and Japan's own economic revival.

More than 52,000 civilians perished during the battle of Okinawa, after which the island was forgotten as military bureaucracy concentrated on rebuilding Japan. This left the Okinawans in a tenuous position as many of them became laborers on military bases, while others existed on handouts from American soldiers. As George Kerr wrote about the island's post war period: "For military men the Ryukyus became a place of exile from GHQ and Japan proper, and for ambitious civilians with the army it was 'no man's land,' 'the end of the line,' or 'the Rock,' a veritable Siberia much too far from Tokyo's neon lights." (Kerr, *Okinawa History of an Island People*, 5)

This negligence hampered Okinawa's rebuilding, whereas in Japan it was encouraged by American business interests and military doctrines. General Douglas MacArthur supported trade unions which distributed Japan's wealth and helped build a thriving middle class. He also suppressed the power of family trusts that had controlled Japan's economy for many years and encouraged American industrialists and scholars, such as W. Edwards Deming, to contribute ideas and technology to the rebuilding of Japan's industry. Moreover, the 1950's saw karate's popularity rise again in Japan as General Curtis B. LeMay, a dedicated Judoka, instituted hand-to-hand combat programs for U.S. servicemen taught by leading Japanese Judoka and Karate-ka. This, along with Japan's economic revival, enabled Japanese karate to achieve a place in the international spotlight which overshadowed Okinawan styles for years to come.

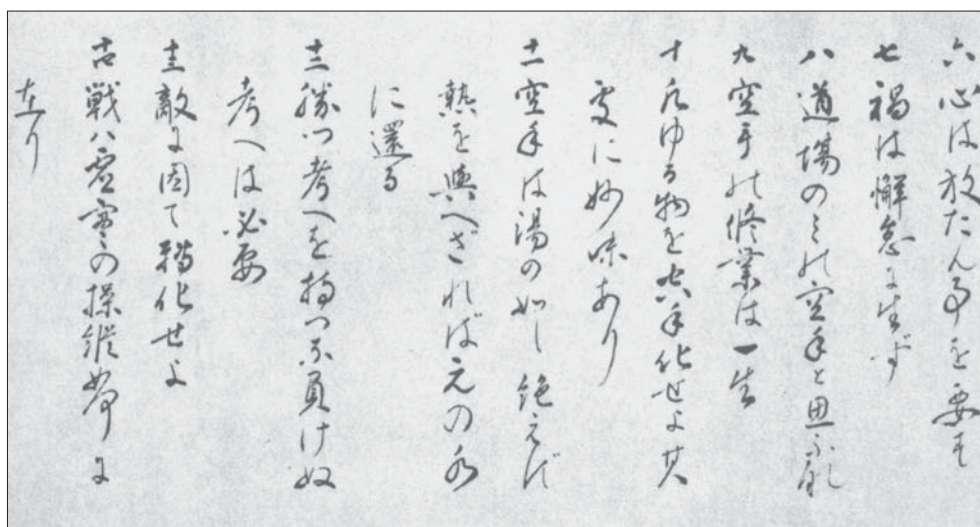
However, it was the western society's own inability to distinguish between sport and traditional styles, Okinawan and Japanese teachings, which gave rise to contemporary beliefs that all forms of karate were the same. Adding to this confusion is karate's introduction to the United States, Great Britain and Europe where it was promoted as either a sport or a martial art developed from centuries of battlefield combat. The latter being in spite of the fact that the styles introduced were not much older than the western karate-ka practicing them.

It was due to these oversights that many Westerners were left uncertain about karate's identity. However, despite this predicament, karate's regimented style of teaching appealed

to many in the West, as it did to the Japanese, because of its linear nature, a by product of earlier British, American and European influences on Japan. Modern karate's learning syllabus has a beginning, middle and end point, each defined by the ryu's teaching syllabus and the kyu-dan ranking structure. Therefore, the student examines where he or she is along the ryu's linear progression: "I know ten kata and hold a san-dan ranking so I'm one third of the way to tenth dan," and thus a practitioner's progress is automatically determined for them.

Although the modern ryu's teaching syllabus has done much to promote karate world wide, it sometimes contrasts with how Chojun Miyagi, Choki Motobu and others of this caliber accessed their merits, which was on a day-by-day, technique-by-technique basis, within the intimacy of a small group of fighters. These were well versed and educated men raised in a culture where an apprenticeship could last ten years and the mastery of an art could take half a lifetime. Their definition of quality was based on traits which developed both one's fighting prowess, as well as their character. Peripheral accoutrements held little, if any, appeal to them.

In Gichin Funakoshi's book *The Twenty Guiding Principles of Karate* Genwa Nakasone presents an example of how important a student's character was when relating the story about sixteenth century sword master Tsukahara Bokuden, who, upon learning that one of his students employed a martial arts technique to avoid being kicked by a horse, dismissed the young man from his dojo. When asked why, since the young man was such a fine tactician, Bokuden replied, "A person with a mental attitude that allows him to walk carelessly by a horse without considering that it may rear up is a lost cause no matter how much he studies technique. I thought that he was a person of much better judgment, but I was mistaken" (Funakoshi, *Twenty Guiding Principles*, 40) Such traits, are the essence of all styles of karate, either sport or traditional-Japanese or Okinawan, because they enable us to become not only superior fighters, but better humans as well.



The 20 Precepts of Gichin Funakoshi

Chapter 7

Kata: The Soul of Karate

Kata is a name for the pre-arranged training rituals that contain karate's teaching syllabus. The concept of using prearranged training rituals to preserve and transmit martial knowledge is as old as civilization and can be found in all styles of fighting.

Kata/Prearranged training rituals have four basic goals:

1. They preserve techniques and tactics.
2. They allow fighters to transmit techniques and tactics.
3. They allow practice of techniques that are too dangerous to be used in free sparring.
4. They help the fighter to develop neuromuscular responses that can be applied to combat.

Like other martial arts, early forms of Okinawan Te were practiced in a ritualistic manner to ensure consistent strategies and preserve existing martial knowledge. However, with the Satsuma's occupation of Okinawa, the practice of Te was initially forced underground and alternative methods were used to preserve the fighting art. As Mark Bishop observed, "After the Satsuma invasion several (bugyo) were set up, one of which was for dance, i.e., dance Te, and it is not surprising that the highest Ryukyu court officials were the most accomplished dancers. Neither is it strange that, with the gradual demilitarization of the kingdom, these dance commissioners (odori bugyo) encouraged the choreographic interpretation of the meditative forms of advance Te practice into set patterns of court dance. In short, Te dances became secret Te katas," (Bishop, *Okinawan Karate*, 105).

This method of preservation was only the beginning of a process that would have much affect the development of karate kata. For as the popularity of Chinese boxing grew on Okinawa, so too did prearranged boxing patterns, each one being a tradition complete with striking, blocking, joint locking and grappling techniques. When transplanted to Okinawa, these prearranged patterns, which became karate kata, underwent an assimilation that made them more suitable to Okinawan culture. Morio Higaonna noted the effects of this assimilation:

Sanchin kata was practiced with *Nukite* when Chojun Miyagi first learned it from Higaonna Sensei. Chojun Sensei related to An'chi Miyagi that during *Sanchin* practice, when executing *Nukite*, Higaonna Sensei would tell him to blow hard as he thrust out his hand quickly.

It is not certain exactly when *Nukite* in *Sanchin* changed to the closed fist, but An'ichi Sensei did say, 'From olden times in China, *Nukite* had been practiced and tempered to be

a strong and dangerous technique. In Okinawa on the other hand, *tijikun* (Okinawan Fist) has been practiced for centuries. Punching the makiwara is natural for Okinawans. It is most likely for this reason that the *Nukite* strike changed to a closed fist (Higaonna, *The History of Karate*, 37).

The Chinese boxing patterns assumed the physical characteristics considered most acceptable by the Okinawans, their appearance altered by social decorum and individual taste. This is the reason one finds several variations of many of the karate kata. For instance Kusanku kata, which although present in several styles of both Okinawan and Japanese karate, differs due to the varying tastes of each styles founder. Moreover, with karate's exportation from Okinawa and Japan to Korea, America and other western cultures, its kata underwent even further changes due to nationalistic pride and competitive demands.

With karate's initial introduction to Japan, attempts were made to classify the kata as being either Shorei or Shorin based, Shorei being those which emphasized forcefulness and muscular strength, while Shorin based kata were those that relied upon light and rapid movements. However, this classification process fell short of its intended goal because most, if not all, of karate's kata contain both internal and external elements, light and forceful actions, blocking, striking, joint locks, grappling and even in some instances weapons play. Kata evolved out of a pragmatic need to preserve martial knowledge, and their identities were established with this in mind. They were not intended to represent a system *per se*, although many are complete paradigms in their own right, but were instead used to preserve a combative theme, its strategies and techniques. As such, traditional concerns focused more upon those strategies found within a kata than they did which style it came from, as is the case today.

The Evolution and Experience of Kata

St Matthew 13.13 reads, "This is the reason I speak to them in figures because they see and cannot perceive, and they hear and yet do not listen, nor do they understand."

This passage, though set in a Christian religious context, undoubtedly speaks volumes about the negative perceptions levied against kata today. We see but do not perceive kata; we hear but do not listen to it, and this leaves us ignorant about the rituals higher knowledge. Consequently, it is no small wonder that kata is considered useless and why our opinions blame the tradition instead of our ignorance. It was, after all, Gichin Funakoshi who penned the phrase, "Perform Kata exactly; actual combat is another matter," and Genwa Nakasone who added further insight by writing "But in actual combat, it will not do to be hampered or shackled by the rituals of kata. Instead, the practitioner should transcend kata, moving freely according to the opponent's strengths and weaknesses." (Funakoshi, *Twenty Guiding Principles*, 104)

Despite the insights of Gichin Funakoshi, Kenwa Mabuni, Chojun Miyagi and many other prominent karate-ka, the practice of kata is an ambiguous one for many westerners. Either they love kata or they hate it, but usually there is no middle ground. Hence kata is never

viewed as a process which develops one's physical and spiritual attributes until the ritual is transcended, or even cast aside completely. Ironically, this all or nothing attitude is a by product of the western mind, not karate's kata. While exploring the meaning of symbolism and ritual in both Eastern and Western cultures Joseph Campbell, renowned professor of creative mythology wrote:

For in the history of our still youthful species, a profound respect for inherited forms has generally suppressed innovation. Millenniums have rolled by with only minor variations played on themes derived from God-knows-when. Not so, however, in our recent West, where, since the middle of the twelfth century, an accelerating disintegration has been undoing the formidable orthodox tradition that came to power in that century, and with its fall, the released creative powers of a great company of towering individuals have broken forth: so that not one, or even two or three, but a galaxy of mythologies-as many, one might say, as the multitude of its geniuses-must be taken into account in any study of the spectacle of our own titanic age. (P.3)

Although Dr. Campbell's statement concerns religion and mythology, the mindset to which he alludes, can and does, influence Western and Eastern perspectives where kata and karate are concerned. Hence, one reason why many westerners' tend to shun kata completely, and, are more apt to found a new style of karate, than say their Okinawan, or Japanese counterpart. It is part of the Western heritage to disregard rituals which we either don't understand or disagree with. And while this independence of mind has helped elevate Western society, it has simultaneously hindered it in other areas, kata being one of them.

Kata, like karate, is a complex experience whose private dimensions vary from person to person. A medium through which physical and spiritual growth can be achieved, the horizons of kata broaden with time allowing the artist to transcend the experience itself. Yet despite the complexities involved, the substance of kata is elementary and its role in karate has remained unchanged for many years. However, for us to understand its role, we must first examine the conditions which gave birth to kata because they existed long before the word *karate* was ever spoken.

Knowledge is gained thorough experience and this maxim is never as true as it is in mortal combat. Throughout history from Paleolithic times to the present, mankind has sought ways to retain and transmit martial knowledge. With our early hunter-gather ancestors, this task was fairly simple due to the primitive weaponry and tactics involved. However, as weapons and tactics grew more sophisticated, so did the ways mankind stored and transmitted marital knowledge. Dance, folksongs, cave drawings and poetry have all been used to fill this need. Yet the most effective means was, and still is, through the use of pre-arranged sequences of movement, or kata, as they are known in karate.

Prearranged forms of fighting, in all probability, evolved from folk dancing which was used within many pre-modern cultures both to record and transmit information. Dance is a story enacted three dimensionally complete with music, movement and dialogue that recreate

past events or celebrate existing traditions. Likewise even today in remote regions such as New Guinea, where many people cannot read nor write, dance serves as a medium to preserve a society's history and transmit information. Such was the case in Okinawa where dance, as Geroge Kerr observes, served as one of the oldest forms of celebration and communication: "Themes for the pantomimic dance-dramas and the songs which accompanied them were drawn from legend and history, treated with a bawdy humor or tinged with melancholy, alternating between rollicking and lusty gaiety and the haunting, sad themes of separation, or poverty, or thwarted love." (Kerr, *Okinawa History of an Island People*, 217)

Dance mirrors kata in utilizing muscular energy, body motion and mental alertness to convey its message and has been a keystone in many cultures for perfecting the warrior's skills. Used by the ancient Greeks, the pyrrhic war dance was complete with body shifting, strikes, blocks, weapons play and intricate footwork and was often performed while wearing armor. The same relationship can also be found throughout Africa, Indonesia, the Philippines and Okinawa where traditional weapons dances have been used to preserve martial strategies. Likewise, dance has both directly and indirectly influenced the Okinawan fighting arts. However, today these rituals differ, for while dance maintains prearranged sequences of movement for aesthetical purposes, kata uses them to preserve martial strategies. Hence, one's goal is visual, the other's combative.

The traditional Kata of Okinawan karate are uniformed paradigms, which through constant practice of the karate-ka develops first a basic insight and then an abstract understanding greater than the paradigm itself. A process based on the tenet that the karate-ka achieves mastery through direct, hands on experience, rather than verbal debate or written explanation. Therefore, much like the Renaissance painters and classical dancers, who by replicating the master's works perfected their own skills, so is it for the karate-ka who practices kata. And while dance can be used as a preparatory exercise for combat, the intrinsic movements of karate's kata often simulate behaviors endemic to fighting much more closely because of their grounded, forceful actions, traits commonplace when two enemies meet at arm's length, their adrenaline rushing as blows are exchanged.

Despite dance and kata sharing complimentary bonds, the ritualized structure of karate's kata is often attributed to earlier neo-Confucian influences which impacted the development of both Chinese and Japanese martial arts. Neo-Confucian teachings placed much emphasis on ritualized action, believing that one might rationalize or explain an experience with verbal debate but that it was only through ritual practice that one could acquire true knowledge and understanding of a subject. *Li*, or ritual, brings organization to chaos and aligns specific ideas and principles so that they may be understood through direct experience. Likewise, the principle of *Li*, when applied to human realms, serves as both the fabric which holds society together and the instrument that instills religious, sociological and physiological dimensions into humanity. *Li* and its importance are best described in *The Book of Rites* which states that "While the rules of ceremony [*li*] have their origin in heaven,

the movement of them reaches to earth. The distribution of them extends to all the business (of life). They change with the seasons; they agree in reference to the (variation of) lot and condition. In regard to man, they serve to nurture (his nature). They are practiced by means of offerings, acts of strength, words, and postures of courtesy, in eating and drinking, in the observances of capping, marriage, mourning, sacrificing, archery, chariot-driving, audiences, and friendly missions” (Legge, *The Sacred Books of the East*:vol.27,388). It is because of this Confucian and Neo-Confucian ideology that karate’s kata are so ritualized and possess various levels of interpretation. They are physical embodiments of *Li*, used first in China, to create combative rituals which were later transmitted to Okinawa. However, other Neo-Confucian philosophies have also influenced the development of kata, such as *Xin* which stresses the cultivation of both heart and mind through ritualized practice; *Nei/wai* which recognizes the internal and external dimensions associated with the process of ritual; and *liyi fenshu* which is the principle that while one ritual may be united, its manifestations can carry over to many things. It is due to these philosophies that kata manifests itself both physically and symbolically.

The strength of symbolic representation is that one object holds several meanings, and serves not only a literal purpose but also a metaphoric one, thus stirring the human imagination and allowing us to ponder unlimited parallels. When applied to kata, this process gives one technique both literal and metaphorical qualities- the literal being the techniques most basic application while its variations serve as metaphors, or the higher concepts, which are built upon literal applications.

This metaphorical process was, in part, inherited by karate’s kata from Chinese boxing, which utilizes *Jin* (Martial Power) patterns to manifest both internal and external power, as well as offensive and defensive strategies. Dr. Yang Jwing- Ming wrote about the *Jin* patterns role in White Crane boxing that “From each *Jin* pattern, many applications are derived. Normally, how to apply the *Jin* patterns into martial applications is kept secret by the master. How deep a White Crane practitioner understands these applications depends on individual ability in White Crane styles. It also depends on personal martial arts experiences. Although the number of *Jins* is limited, the applications can be countless and profound.” (Yang, *Shaolin White Crane*, 263)

This process of learning can and often does give rise to the myth of secret bunkai among the ranks of younger, more inexperienced karate-ka. While it is true some explanations are kept from the student, the reasons usually have to do more with ability than mysticism. The student has to grow within his or her own training and achieve a certain level of maturity and skill before understanding the correlation between concept and technique, as well as abstract and literal translations of the kata. It is at best a tedious experience. However, its true worth is that every time the student performs kata, he or she learns something not only about the form, but about their self. The process, though, is never complete, for just as a mirror shines brighter with each polishing, so to is it with kata that with each passing year a deeper realm is uncovered.

Chapter 8

Transcendence of Kata

Within agrarian and pre-industrialized societies, metaphor and symbolic representation played key roles in how a person identified with world and self. An object's worth, especially if related to spiritual or personal realms, was judged not in a literal sense, as is often the case today, but by the depth of knowledge, or inspiration, that could be plumbed from said object or ritual. Therefore, a complex ritual like kata would have been analyzed with a creative rule of measure indigenous to the Okinawan culture.

The traditional method for analyzing and interpreting a kata began with its initial presentation to the student, which was often done in solo fashion, and then followed by the practice of pre-arranged kumite using kata techniques. However, as the student grew in his or her karate and progressed through the apprentice ranks, the kata would take on symbolic qualities that transformed it into a medium for both internal and external forms of practice, as well as giving countless variations to its techniques. This, in turn, made the kata come to life and change as the karate-ka's skills and insights grew. Moreover, as the practitioners achieved mastery of their art, they would transcend the kata as its techniques, strategies and rhythms came to be natural movements their body had internalized through countless hours of training.

The process which leads to the transcendence of kata is related to the stages of *Shu*, *Ha* and *Ri*. *Shu* is the stage where the kata is first taught and performed in an exact manner, more often than not in solo fashion to ensure the student perfects proper body mechanics, stances, breathing, timing and technique. It is only after progress has been made in these areas that the student is allowed to practice the kata's technique with a partner. *Ha* is the stage during which the karate-ka, who usually at this point has spent numerous years training, begins to personalize the kata to suit their individual needs. This includes modifying bunkai during two-person practice as well as even changing the kata itself. This can and often does lead to new variations of an old kata as seen throughout karate. *Ri* is the point beyond standardization, and even in some instances ritual itself, for it is at this stage that the kata has become part of the karate-ka. Its techniques are executed naturally and without thought as are the breathing, timing, body mechanics and rhythms found within the kata.

Transcendence of kata can only be achieved through many years of devoted practice. However, this process can also be accentuated by social customs, as well as training aids, that impart physical and creative skills in the practitioner which he or she then applies to the practice of kata.

The impact of social customs on a fighting art is commonplace, and Okinawa is no exception to this rule. In fact, its social morals and customs are what give karate its strongest

characteristics. Consequently, the influence of Okinawan folkdance both directly and indirectly helped instill kata with a depth of practice uncommon in many of today's dojos.

From a creative standpoint, dance allowed the karate-ka to set aside rigid guidelines and view kata with an open mindset, thereby recognizing similar principles of movement and how they complemented one another. On a physical plane, dance would have exposed the karate-ka to new rhythms, lighter, more agile movements and different breathing patterns that would aid in identifying transitional points found between techniques which are crucial for rapid change of direction during combat. This effect, when combined with kata practice, increased the karate-ka's skill levels, enhancing muscular memory by different movements and exercises, which, in time, carried the karate-ka beyond the boundaries of kata. Dance, however, wasn't the only medium that added to the richness of kata or helped the practitioner transcend the ritual's boundaries. Other practices also contributed to this process and continue to do so today.

Kihon's Relation to Kata

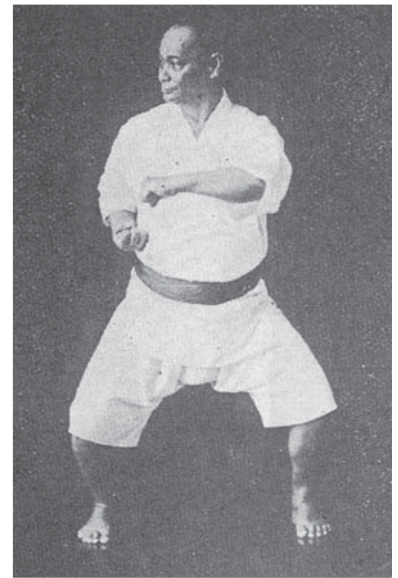
From birth our bodies are imbued with natural movements that we perform without thought but in which we develop proficiency as they are executed over a period of time. Some of these are walking, grabbing, chopping and thrusting. In Hoplological, parlance such movements are categorized as either primary or secondary patterns. Primary ones are those natural movements we are born with while secondary are those actions we learn. Often is the case that our primary movements serve as a foundation for the secondary ones we learn. Catching a baseball would be a good example of this, for it is the primary movement of 'grabbing' which enables the outfielder to catch a high fly ball. However, along with the grabbing movement, running and correct hand placement are also needed to make the catch. Moreover, these secondary movements, when combined with the primary movement of grabbing, are what enable the player to catch the high fly ball.

In karate, when our natural movements are refined into a technique, then a neuromuscular response is formed through constant practice, allowing the karate-ka to execute his or her technique under a host of different circumstances. Kihon, or basic technique practice, allows the karate-ka to refine primary movements into techniques at one of the most basic levels known. And, since kata is comprised of a grouping of individual techniques, then solo practice helps reinforce those lessons imparted by the kata. Similarly, the practice of techniques not found in a kata, still refines motor skill development, timing and stamina.

Solo Practice of Kata

Solo kata practice is, perhaps, the most preferred method in karate today and certainly the most recognized. This method enables the karate-ka to practice independently of a training partner while at the same time developing neuromuscular skills.

Thorough solo practice, the karate-ka begins developing proper body mechanics, breathing, form and proper technique. When first presented, the kata should be taught at slow speed to allow the beginner to memorize its sequential actions. Only later should the tempo be increased. These initial stages of learning occur when the neuromuscular responses, organic to a particular kata, are first revealed. Therefore practicing too fast at an early stage leads to improper development. In contrast, slow practice of kata can be used by advanced karate-ka to learn relaxation and enhance proper breathing. At medium speeds of practice, pains should be taken to visualize one's opponents, their reactions and variations of kata bunkai.



Motobu Kata

Solo kata practice done fast should be attempted only after proficiency has been gained at slow and medium speeds.

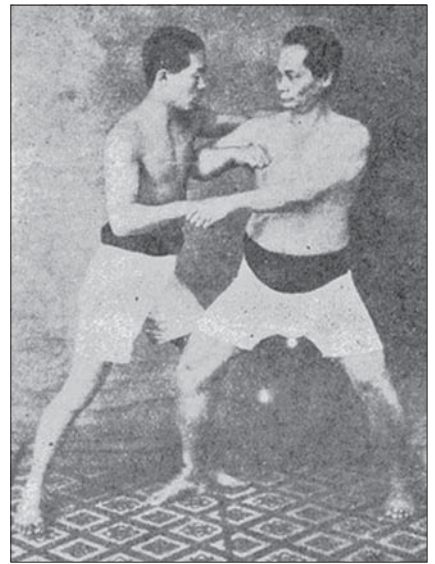
Practicing kata full speed is an anaerobic explosion designed to push the karate-ka to the very limit as he or she attempts to mold both mind and body into one functioning unit, attaining a Zen state of consciousness. Despite sounding mystical, these effects are garnered from an intense focus during which the karate-ka's mind and body are completely devoted to the execution of kata. As such the fighter is no different from the ballet dancer, or baseball pitcher who, completely devoted to their craft, performs flawlessly while being oblivious to the crowd's applause.

Despite its merits, one fallacy of solo practice is that the karate-ka develops a tendency to "run through" the kata without proper focus, breathing or technique. This is a common occurrence among those competing in tournaments, where speed and flamboyancy often take precedence over movements, which, although slower, have more precision. In such instances as these, it should be kept in mind that traditional kata practice is not intended to be a foot race. Skill can only be developed through precise, well executed movements.

Two Person Drills

Kata practice *via* two-person drills entails the isolation of a specific technique found in a kata, which is then practiced by two people seeking greater knowledge about its numerous applications. This method of practice is not a competition but a mutual learning experience where one person agrees to play the role of attacker and the other defender. During two person practice, it is vital that both karate-ka maintain a high vigilance and that both the attack and defense be executed in a spirited manner. Although addressing kata practice in Judo, Donn Draeger in his long standing classic, *Judo Training Methods*, wrote about the execution of technique during two person kata practice that "A tendency in kata practice today seems to be the meaningless application of the various kata, being studied and applied only as a prerequisite to the various Dan. Trainees enter into kata quite reluctantly, and the average approach brings little material benefit. Instructors and trainees must employ

kata in their training sessions, and should understand that the prearranged exercises are to be practiced with meaning in accordance with the principles of attack and defense and should convey such spirit. Movements made with careless motion or those with no mental alertness become useless” (Draeger, *Judo Training Methods*, 87). This also applies to the study of karate kata, in which each technique should be practiced as if it were in under actual circumstances. Moreover, such training should also include, joint locking, grappling, as well as stick and knife defense.



Motobu Kumite

While quite possibly one of the most beneficial ways to practice kata, breaking the ritual down into isolated segments is also one of the most neglected aspects of kata today. Our hesitation to do so comes not only from lack of understanding, but also from an overriding tendency to view each kata as a sacred cow never to be butchered, no matter how hungry we are. This is a belief which overlooks the fact that progress is made only after the cow has been butchered, dissected and eaten. Kata sequences should be isolated and practiced in a realistic manner for it is only by doing so that our skill levels will grow.

Sensing Hands Kakie

Imported from China, sensing hands practice, known as kakie, was commonplace among Okinawan fighters before Karate’s introduction to Japan. However, as karate assumed sport characteristics and with its widespread popularity in the West, kakie came to be identified as a Goju-ryu training aid. Prior to this time, kakie was not limited by stylistic boundaries given the eclectic nature of early karate. Mabuni Kenwa, founder of Shito-ryu, studied both Shuri-Te and Naha-Te and was no doubt exposed to kakie while training with Kanryo Higaonna. Tatsuo Shimabuku, founder of Isshinryu Karate also studied Goju-ryu; however, his reason for omitting kakie from Isshinryu’s teaching syllabus is a mystery.

Push hands, sensing hands, and kakie are all terms used to describe sensitivity drills that teach a fighter how to mold with an opponent thereby gaining an edge through pliability. Within both internal and external styles of Chinese boxing, sensing hands drills are practiced with one of the most popular being Tai Chi’s push hands drill. Other Asian cultures also embrace the sensing hands concept as can be seen in the teaching formats of Indonesian Silat and softer forms of Burmese Bando.

Kakie’s importance is that it helps the karate-ka develop a sensitivity in the arms allowing him or her to mold with the opponent’s movements, thereby capitalizing upon any openings that may be presented. The concept’s premise is one of yield and conquer, for where there is resistance, there is force, and if your opponent can exert force upon you, then in all

likelihood, you will be injured. When combined with locking and grappling strategies, this feature of kata, adds a depth of complexity normally not found within mainstream schools today.

There are many ways to practice kakie, all of which have their merits. However, it is usually best to begin with basic routines and then progress in complexity as skill levels increase. The most basic practice of kakie is performed with both karate-ka standing in a stationary position, using one hand, which, when moving in unison, travels back and forth in a straight line between the two practitioners. This can be done in a Seisan stance; however, if emphasis is being placed on lower body development, then Sanchin, Seiuchin or Nahanchi stances can be used.

As the karate-ka grows comfortable with the forward and backwards hand movements, then other actions can be utilized such as circular and side to side actions. The key behind early kakie practice is getting the karate-ka used to adhering to, and molding with, the training partner's movements. Proper footwork and technique will come with time; however, the student should initially strive to overcome fear of maintaining intimate contact with an opponent. Once this fear diminishes, then the ability to predict an opponent's actions by light touch starts developing. Nevertheless, this ability can only be developed if the karate-ka is secure enough to mold with an opponent's attack in a relaxed and flowing manner.

After single arm kakie has been perfected then it is time for two arm kakie. This exercise is basically the same as single arm, except that two arms, instead of one, are now being used. The intensity of kakie training can be increased at this stage by having the practitioners move in prearranged sets, or else by allowing them to practice free form during which any stepping pattern or arm action the karate-ka chooses can be used, provided contact is not broken between the two practitioners.

Alternative Kata Practice, Ground Grappling and Closing the Range

More often than not today, kata is presented to the student as a complete entity, one never to be broken apart but studied only through solo practice. In actuality, kata is a grouping of individual techniques and strategies which, when brought together make up a cohesive paradigm. But despite the paradigm's cohesiveness, some techniques used within kata can be omitted during practice so as to allow the karate-ka to focus on a particular concept or technique.

Kicks, heel stomps and knee strikes are often used in traditional karate kata to accentuate the effectiveness of locking and throwing techniques. This strategy serves two purposes. First, it allows the karate-ka to strike an opponent before executing a throw. Second it helps distract the opponent while the lock or throw is being applied. Unfortunately, it is common to interpret kicking techniques as being the core strategies of a kata, and in doing

so, incipient practitioners overlook strategies which hold a much more profound combative rational, particularly where grappling is concerned.

It is essential that the karate-ka be able to identify and use grappling techniques found in the kata. Therefore, to enhance this learning experience, the kata should be practiced minus kicks during solo and two- person training. This not only helps the karate-ka recognize existing grappling strategies, but it also exposes them to a different rhythm of movement, one unbroken by a kick. Hence, the karate-ka is able to practice the lock or throw in a manner, much the same as found in Aikido or ju-jutsu, thereby helping him or her to appreciate yielding and molding with an attacker's actions. This same principle can be applied to punching, permitting the karate-ka to perform the kata at its most base level, thereby revealing core body movements which are the paradigm's foundation. By doing so, the karate-ka comes to have a better appreciation for slipping, shifting and distributing weight, activities which are ever present but seldom go noticed during kata practice.

Unfortunately, studying the intrinsic value of kata is frequently overlooked today because of tournament demands that necessitate flamboyance in performance. This emphasis on show performance often leads to hyper-fast executions, higher than normal kicks, exaggerated breathing, broken rhythms and other traits, which, although impressive to the audience, go against the grain of traditional kata. When combined with point sparring, these mannerisms lead the karate-ka into thinking that a fight begins at foot's distance and then progresses outward, a notion counterintuitive to traditional kata practice where the engagement starts at foot's distance, then progresses closer to the karate-ka, providing the reason for locking and grappling techniques.

As simple as the matter of distance may seem, it is one of the crucial dividing points between sport and combative methods of practice. For within the realms of life and death, hand-to-hand combat, the distinction between offense and defense becomes non-existent as both combatants try to kill or maim one another. The will to survive makes a person exhibit aggressive behaviors, putting the combatant in either a fight or flight mode. Should the person decide to fight, then he or she will be like a caged animal which knows only one route to survival: attack. Arthur Anderson, member of the International Hopology Society, described this behavior and its effects on combat: "Even when you surprise the enemy, they don't just stand there. They attack your attack in a state of startled mayhem. It's a fumbling, bumbling mess where the idea is to be calm and control your breathing, but the reality is that you smash, crash, bash and scream bloody murder, cutting, stabbing, slashing, biting, hitting anything that gets in the way or comes within distance" (Anderson, *Hoplos, Winter 2002*, 12).

The fight or flight behavior pattern is addressed in traditional kata training where most engagements begin at foot's distance and then move towards the karate-ka, resulting in the use of grappling and locking techniques to subdue the opponent, or else holding the opponent in a position until a fatal strike can be executed. Tournament fighting differs in

that one player attacks and the other moves away, a strategy that employs no close quarter's techniques and exhibits none of the fight or flight behavior characteristics commonplace in mortal combat.

If the karate-ka is to gain proficiency in grappling and locking strategies these strategies should be isolated and practiced independently. Nevertheless, this course of action requires a strong distinction between point-tournament and combative engagements, as well as the behaviors associated with each type of fighting. Likewise, with the influence of UFC style fighting, the differences between sport-grappling and self-defense based grappling need to be recognized.

Sport methods used in UFC events base their strategies on taking an opponent to the ground where he or she can be defeated by superior stamina and grappling skills. This strategy is well suited for the arena where opponents fight one- on- one and unarmed. However, during mortal combat, to stay afoot is to stay alive because numerous opponents may be encountered, some of whom may be armed; therefore mobility is essential for one's survival. It is this environment that traditional karate kata are designed for and the reason why techniques which require spending a prolonged period on the ground are not found within them, despite sumo wrestling's popularity in Okinawan culture.

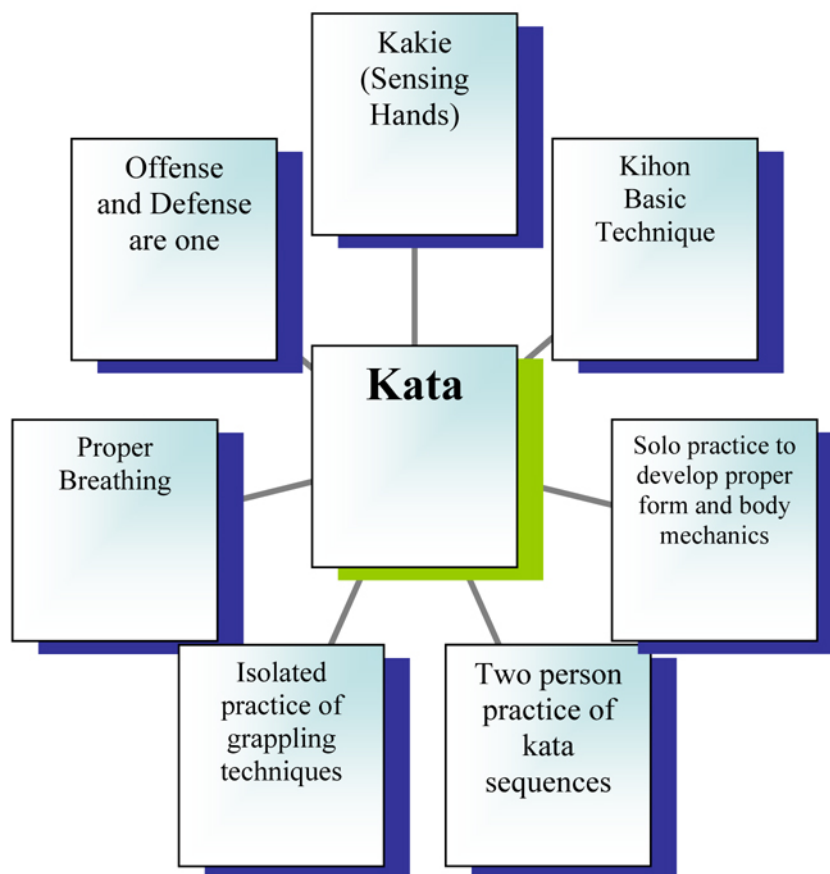
Most traditional kata teach a mobile form of fighting that uses locks, holds and submissions to restrain an opponent long enough until a debilitating strike can find its target. The goal is to hurt an attacker severely so that the karate-ka can get safely out of harm's way instead of fighting a prolonged ground-grappling engagement and attracting other assailants during the struggle.

The strong emphasis placed on upright fighting in traditional kata imbues these forms with an anaerobic rhythm, rather than an aerobic one. Much of this rhythm's purpose stems from traditional kata being designed for mortal combat where engagements tend to be short, fast, and violent. Therefore, explosive power takes precedence over aerobic endurance. Hence the reason why many traditional kata rely on quick, explosive bursts of energy to execute several well placed techniques and their practice is of an anaerobic nature, instead of an aerobic one.



Grappling technique from
Kenwa Mabuni and Genwa
Nakasone's book "Kobo Kenpo
Karate-do Nyumon"

The following diagram depicts the seven elements of kata practice:



Although often misunderstood today, kata is a means by which the fighter can preserve knowledge, enhance skills and develop personal insight. Kata practice stimulates growth instead of hindering it, but often this is the case when we view kata in a one dimensional manner. When practiced in a traditional venue, kata is one of the most beneficial forms of training available to the karate-ka. It is only when the traditional venues are discarded that the ritual's message is lost.

Chapter 9

Okinawan Kobudo: From Swords to Boat Oars

The first effort of human technology was probably weapon making,” wrote Sir Richard Burton, in his timeless classic *The Book of The Sword*. History supports Burton’s statement and shows us that no nation, state or tribe has ever shunned the use of weapons. In fact, Charles Darwin argued in *The Descent of Man* that our species as a whole owes its existence to the manufacture and use of weaponry. Darwin believed that it was our bipedal nature and enlarged brain that allowed us to make and use primitive weaponry, with which we came to rely on to hunt with instead of our canine teeth. As time passed we became more accustomed to using weapons than teeth with which to kill, leading to the development of stone spears, bows and arrows, as well as the development of strong social groups who had developed tactics for hunting and killing game.⁽¹⁴⁾

Our Paleolithic ancestors realized that it was safer to kill their game at a distance, than to engage them at arm’s length a range at which the primitive hunters could be killed during the course of the hunt. Like humans, large game, such as wild boar, elk, bear and deer are dangerous creatures when encountered at close quarters. Hence, to kill a larger animal at close range required explosive power during execution of attack, aggressiveness, immense physical conditioning, and, above all, a resolute mindset to face the possibility of a gruesome death. These predatory traits would, in time, come to serve as the foundation for many latter day fighting arts.

Although much of mankind’s martial prowess would evolve from hunting, it nonetheless proved to be an activity that would not fully develop his fighting skills. It was only when mortal combat against fellow humans occurred that the sophistication of mankind’s fighting skill increased. And as the nature of mortal combat became more sophisticated, the distance at which an engagement was fought began to play a much more crucial role.

Distance separated the warrior’s weapons into two basic, but broad, categories: those of the missile class such, as rocks, arrows, javelins, (plus latter day firearms), and those of the shock class such as clubs, swords, spears, tonfa, and sai. The latter items were used extensively in close quarters combat, provided the warrior could advance past missile range, close to shock range and then maintain the courage to fight his enemy at arms distance. Yet this practice grew increasingly scarce as the use of firearms proliferated on a worldwide scale, a change affecting not only traditional weapons training, but also its ethos and role within society.

The evolutionary process associated with the use of weapons was transplanted to Okinawa by people migrating from neighboring lands. Excavations at Prehistoric Ryukyuan shell mounds have uncovered arrowheads, harpoon points, axes, hoes and hammers. Although the recorded history of early Okinawan culture is sparse, it is known that by the 8th century

A.D., the island was filled with petty warlords who were constantly at war with one another. As Okinawan society grew more advanced, the ownership of weapons became strongly associated with the warrior class who used glaives, swords, bow and arrows and wore body armor on the battlefield. Just as on other battlefields, the Okinawan man of arms had to contend with both projectile and shock weaponry during combat.

The manner of warfare fought on Okinawa during its warring states period mirrored that of Japan, albeit on a smaller scale, and for good reason. Many of the weapons and much of the armor used by the Okinawans were based on Japanese designs. Mark Bishop noted these similarities, stating that, “It is known however that, apart from ceremonial weapons, which were usually of Chinese origin or design, the main bladed weapons used in Te practice were and still are of the manner and similar use to those found in old Japan.” (Bishop, *Zen Kobudo*, 26-27) Thus as warfare continued among the three rival states, so to did the sophistication of Okinawan Te grow.

The Satsuma’s Influence on Kobudo

With Sho Shin’s demilitarization edits and the Satsuma’s occupation of the island, the use of bladed weapons diminished significantly on Okinawa, but their ownership was not completely eradicated. Piracy was a constant threat to those who sailed the China Sea with the problem becoming so grave during several periods that the Shuri government issued arms to villagers so they could protect themselves against the sea-going marauders. This mandate was also extended to sailors who crewed Okinawan ships and continued well into the 18th century.

Because of the styles of Te that were preserved, weapons training did exist on Okinawa during the Satsuma’s occupation and at times was even promoted by them. This practice was not consistent, however, because of rules governing weapons, their scarcity and pre-existing social customs. Mitsugu Sakihara, writing about Okinawa during this time in history and noting such discrepancies, observed crucial national trends:

However, weapons do not appear to have been as abundant in Ryukyu as in contemporary Japan. First of all, Ryukyu did not produce iron, and second, Sho Shin’s fifty-year reign minimized chances for their use. However, it was the nature of the ruling class that was of particular significance. Ryukyu’s ruling class was a hereditary gentry not dependent upon armed might for their status – unlike the contemporary samurai rulers of Japan. That Ryukyu’s ruling class wore no arms was erroneously ascribed to an alleged ban by either Sho Shin or Satsuma.

Satsuma prohibited new export of arms to Ryukyu in 1639, only in consequence of the Tokugawa embargo of arms going overseas in 1634. Also, in 1699, Satsuma issued a regulation entitled ‘Prohibition of Those Who Travel to Ryukyu Carrying Arms.’ Ryukyuan were permitted to bring their arms to Satsuma for the purpose of repair, but export arms

to Ryukyu was not allowed because these might be unlawfully exported overseas beyond Ryukyu. (Sakihara, *Okinawa History of an Island People*, 544)

Though his experiences come some two hundred years after the Satsuma's 1699 regulation, Gichin Funakoshi reinforces Sakihara's statement when he writes about his own sensei that "Azato was also a highly skilled fencer of the Jigen school of Kendo. Although by no means a braggart, he had utter confidence in his fencing ability, and I once heard him say, "I doubt very much that I would lose to anyone in the country if it came to a duel to the death.' This quiet confidence was later proved to be well founded when Azato met Yorumichi Kanna, one of Okinawa's most famous swordsmen." (Funakoshi, *Karate Do My Way of Life*, 14)

Jigen ryu kenjutsu, the preferred style of the Satsuma may have been transmitted to Okinawa as early as the 17th century by members of the clan who migrated just after the invasion. Once established they married local women, claimed land granted to them by the Shuri government and took part in village activities. And as their descendants also intermarried, these unions would have helped Jigen ryu spread, albeit on a small scale. Jigen Ryu's lineage remains murky, though, until the 19th century when Bushi Matsumura and other members of the pechin class journeyed to Satsuma where they studied this style of Kenjutsu.

Despite Kenjutsu's practice being limited among Okinawans, Jigen Ryu's concepts influenced Kobudo in other ways. Henning Wittwer tells us that "The saber of Jigen-Ryu was not the only weapon of this school which merged in the kingdom of Ryukyu. Togo Shigemasa (2nd generation) created a fighting system relying on common tools rather than 'real' weapons. This tradition bears the name *Jigen-Ryu Bo-Odori* (Stick Dace of the School of Manifestation) and its purpose was to provide military instruction to as many Satsuma social classes as possible. In this folkloric spectacle, performers imitate strikes and blocks with different kinds of weapons, and automatically carry out a fighting exercise with a partner. Wooden weapons employed in this dance are: *sanjaku-bo* (3 *shaku* long stick; about 91 cm.), *rokushaku-bo* (6 *shaku* long staff; about 182 cm.), *tenbin-bo* (pole for carrying loads on the shoulder), *ro* (oar), *kai*, *shakuhaci* (bamboo flute; about 55 cm.), and the like weapons made of wood and metal include: *kama* (sickle), *ono* (axe), *suki* (spade), and *kuwa* (mattock). Since the Ryukyu archipelago was occupied by the Satsuma during the Edo period, it is probable that the stick dance was introduced there too. (Witter, *Classical Fighting Arts, Issue#9*, 43) Thus, contrary to popular belief, not only were bladed weapons available on Okinawa during the Japanese occupation, but Okinawan kobudo was also impacted by the Japanese fighting arts. ⁽¹⁵⁾

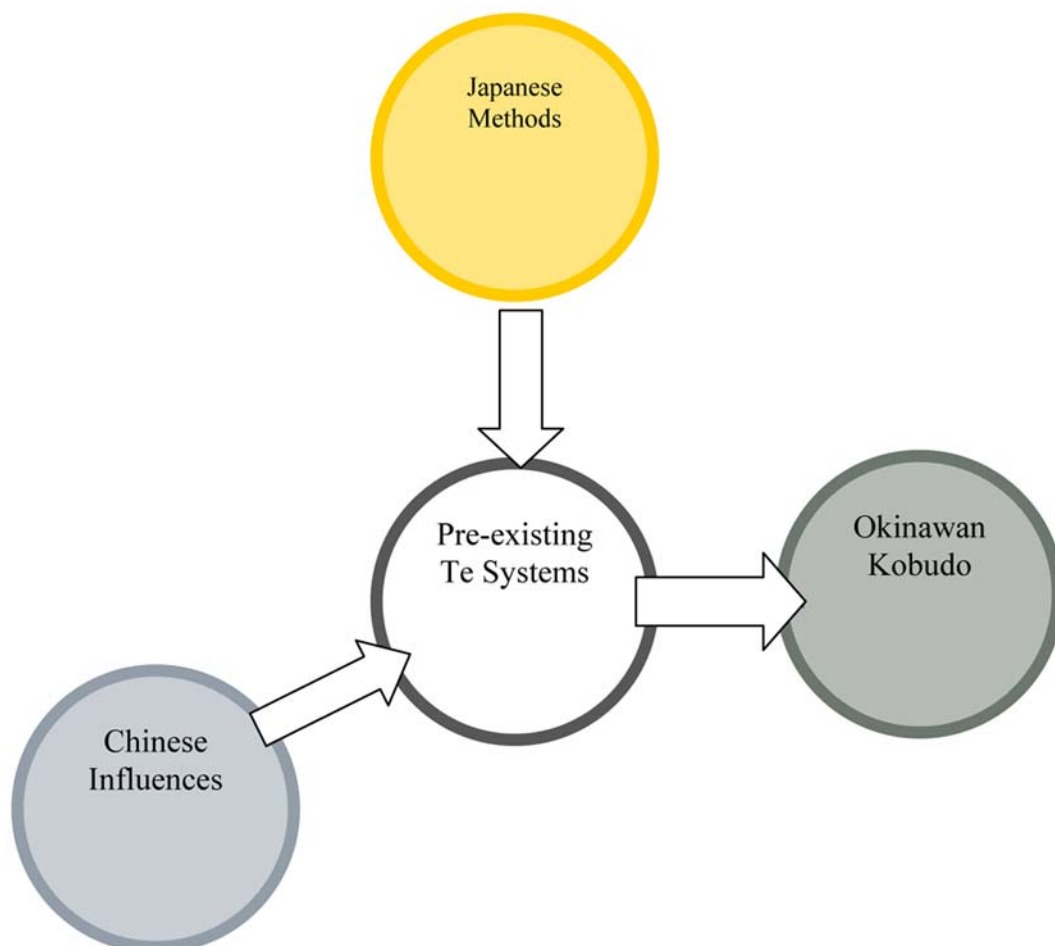
Kobudo

The word *Kobudo*, which literally means old or ancient martial arts, is used to describe all Okinawan weapons arts today. However, aside from the Japanese influences mentioned,

karate's related weapons traditions also drew strongly from pre-existing Te systems, as well as weapons arts imported from China.

China's influence on the Okinawa fighting arts dates back to when the thirty-six families of Fukien settled near Naha, bringing with them their weapons. However, this was not a singular occurrence because other Chinese strategies were introduced to the island, particularly during the 18th century when such notable fighters as Kusanku, a Chinese envoy, and Chatan Yara, make their presence known. The 19th century witnessed the influences of Bushi Matsumura, To-te Sakugawa and Ginowan Donchi upon Okinawan Kobudo, and as Okinawa entered this renaissance period, Chinese trends became vogue among the Okinawans. This resulted in the Okinawans becoming infatuated with the Chinese fighting arts and a stronger emphasis being placed on the use of plebian style weaponry, particularly amongst the commoners.

Okinawan Kobudo grew out of a process of assimilation that combined pre-existing Te strategies with Japanese methodologies and fighting arts imported from China. However, often was the case when an imported technique was applied to a common implement used by the Okinawans in their day- to- day affairs. The boat oar is one example of this phenomenon, its techniques having been influenced by both Chinese staff strategies, as well as spear and glaive techniques from earlier methods of Te. In addition, gentleman's tobacco pipe was another weapon in which either sword or short staff strategies could be adapted to its use. Therefore, in all probability, it was a lack of existing weapons that led to the Okinawan's use of agricultural tools, which, in turn, gave Kobudo its distinct identity.



Despite the differing methodologies contributing to Kobudo's evolution, once united they allowed the fighting art to draw from a diverse background that gave it a vast array of techniques. However, Kobudo's rich heritage consists almost entirely of shock class weapons, requiring a combatant to fight at close quarters. This limitation and the Satsuma's possession of firearms, restricted kobudo to being a self-defense based weapons system, suitable only for civilian purposes.

Taira Shinken

By the time karate had regained nationwide popularity in Japan, there was concern among Okinawans about the deterioration and loss of traditional kata. A few years later, during the 1950's, this concern prompted many Okinawan karate-ka to take measures to preserve both the traditional kata of karate and the art of Kobudo.

Taira Shinken (1897-1970) is considered by many to be the father of modern Kobudo because it was through his efforts that much of the fighting art was preserved. Born on Kume Jima Island, Okinawa, Taira was the middle son in a family of three boys and one girl. As a young man, he worked in the Minami Jima mines where it was not uncommon for miners to be injured or killed while performing their duties. During one of Taira's shifts, the mine shaft in which he was working collapsed and buried him alive. Severely injured he managed to work his way to safety despite a badly broken leg that left him with a painful limp.

Following the accident, many of Taira's fellow miners began ridiculing him about his limp. Some even claimed that he was lazy and useless which prompted him, in 1923, to quit his job and go to Japan. There he intended to study Judo as a way of rehabilitating his body. However, while in Tokyo Taira met Gichin Funakoshi and soon afterwards became his live-in student. Taira was impressed by Funakoshi's demeanor and would spend the next eight years of his life training with the retired school teacher.

In 1929 Funakoshi introduced Taira to Yabiku Moden, a man who Funakoshi knew fairly well since both had been students of Itosu on Okinawa. It was from Yabiku that Taira learned Okinawan Kobudo and three years after their being introduced, Taira was given permission by Funakoshi to open a dojo in Guma prefecture. There Taira taught both kobudo and karate. Always in search of knowledge Taira also sought instruction from Kenwa Mabuni. Mabuni taught Taira for several years, and it was through this relationship that Taira expanded his knowledge of both karate and kobudo.

In 1934, Taira began experimenting with full contact sparring, making weapons out of bamboo, and wearing padded armor that allowed two fighters to go all out without the fear of sustaining serious injury. This innovation may have been a strict departure from traditional forms of kobudo training, steeped in pre-arranged drills. However, it allowed Taira to experience first-hand the impact of fighting with traditional weapons. As such he gleaned much knowledge about timing, distance, offense and defense, as well as the strengths

and weaknesses of each weapon when pitted against its counterparts. Unfortunately, this practice was abandoned given a shortage of materials brought on by the Second World War.

In 1940 Taira Shinken moved back to Okinawa where he later established the Ryukyu Kobudo Hozon Shinko-Kai, an association devoted to the study and preservation of Okinawan Kobudo. His organization grew with its ranks including Mabuni Kenei, son of Mabuni Kenwa, founder of Shito-ryu, Hayashi Teruo, Chibana Chosin, Meitoku Yagi of Goju-ryu fame and Tatsuo Shimabuku founder of Isshinryu karate. In 1964 Taira was awarded the title of Hanshi by the All Japan Kobudo Federation for his devotion and preservation of the art of Kobudo. He died in 1970, recognized as one of the most knowledgeable practitioners of kobudo and the person most responsible for the arts compilation and preservation.



Taira Shinken

Taira's efforts helped preserve Kobudo, but not to the point of its being overly regimented. The fighting arts practice retained an eclectic nature as individual taste dictated the weapons with which one became proficient. Kobudo's inclusion into modern karate was resolved in a similar manner as each style's progenitor determined the weapons included in his ryu-ha's teaching format. Thus, each style of karate is, in essence, a case study of one individual's likes and dislikes concerning Okinawan weaponry.

Kobudo's Role and Practice Today

With sport karate's popularity today, the majority of kobudo training conducted is often for competition. Many is the time when a practitioner stands before an audience in a high school gymnasium, then executes a kobudo kata tailored to reap the highest possible score. Although this method of execution is both physically and mentally taxing, it doesn't approximate weapons combat. Since no antagonist is present, the threat of danger is not real, therefore the biological reactions combatants have during mortal combat are removed. As a result, the executed techniques do not exhibit the same mannerisms as those performed in the heat of battle.

If one aspect of a fighting art's teaching syllabus touches upon the life and death experience of combat more so than any other, it is weapons training. Throughout history man has fought bare-knuckled for both sport and honor, yet only when weapons are introduced does the scenario take on an air of mortal combat. Consider: a warrior can kick an adversary in the solar plexus, and the adversary will survive, but if struck in the same place with a bo, kama or sai, that person's chances are limited.

Kobudo serves as a balance for karate's empty-hand strategies, teaching the practitioner how to use weaponry it also provides valuable insight into the behavior patterns associated

with armed combat. Range plays a key factor in weapons-based systems where combat usually begins afar and then closes until one fighter or the other has landed a fatal blow. Richard Kim described this 'dance of death' in his book, *The Weaponless Warriors*, when he wrote about Yara fighting the Samurai:

In a split second, Yara had the oar firmly gripped and spun around to face his enemy. The samurai, cursing to himself over having lost his tremendous advantage, stopped and assumed a jo-dan kamai. Yara countered this ploy by holding his oar in a dragon tail kamai, and for what appeared to be an eternity to the female spectator, the two men faced each other like statues. Only the sound of their throats and chests heaving for air disturbed the eery musical harmony of the wind and surf.

Suddenly, the samurai struck. Yara's reaction was instantaneous, striking the sword at the hilt with his oar. The blow was perfectly executed, sending the sword skyward, but at the moment of contact, Yara inexplicably jumped upward as though he had anticipated the samurai's next move. This was a dangerous gambit, but it worked. As soon as the Satsuma henchman felt his grip loosen on the hilt of his sword, he immediately squatted to one knee and pulled his short sword.

Yara was in perfect position and took instinctive advantage, unleashing a frighteningly powerful side kick which connected with a sickening thud to the samurai's head. The kick sent him sprawling backward, at the very feet of the girl he had been molesting. Desperately, he tried to raise himself off the ground, but Yara was soon upon him in an instant, slashing his oar downward and crushing the samurai's skull (Kim, *Weaponless Warriors*, 14).

The two antagonists in Kim's story began their engagement at a range of twenty feet, if not farther, and then closed to a distance of around six feet where the final blow was executed. Although his is a vivid account, in no part of the story does Mr. Kim make mention of acrobatic maneuvers. This is because, from a neuromuscular standpoint, the closer one gets to their enemy, the more conservative their actions become since any mistake can prove fatal. Likewise, as combat becomes inevitable, the body will assume a position similar to the hunter's crouch with knees bent, back slightly arched, arms close to the sides and weapon held in a position to threaten the enemy. Additionally a person's movements will grow restricted, due to an increase in adrenaline, and he or she will gaze upon the opponent, much the same as a predatory animal stalks its prey.

In layman's terms, what this means is that during mortal combat, or even scenarios which enact it, the restrictions we hold towards violence are cast off, along with our society's corresponding prohibitions, as we revert to a primal state that places survival at the forefront of our agendas. This human survival instinct, born out of a predatory nature and honed over thousands of years of warfare, is the foundation for almost all mortal combat systems, particularly those that employ weapons. For it is through constant refinement of our survival responses that they become learned techniques.

Due to the biomechanical responses involved traditional forms of armed combat address range differently from what is found in sport karate arenas. Whereas the attack scenario for the modern karate-ka begins at foot or arms distance, in traditional weapons arts the engagement's distance is divided into three segments each one exhibiting a specific trait. Thus, in weapon- to- weapon combat, one simply does bow at the judge's command and then step forward to score a point. Instead, a practitioner advances towards the enemy in a fluid but premeditated manner, the intended goal of which is to gain shock and surprise, thereby allowing the fighter to employ his or her weapon in a more effective manner.

Writing about range and its effects on mortal combat Hunter B. Armstrong, director of the International Hopology Society noted that "While the pre-modern, traditional combat training systems generally include and train approach-closure-entry as an integrated whole, most modern arts, self-defense, and recreational systems start at entry, almost always neglecting the closing phase, never mind the approach. Regarding the rapid closing-in upon an opponent, research by both the military and ethologists show that the rushing in upon an adversary (animal or man) has a strong disruptive effect on an adversary's equilibrium. Rapid moving in upon an opponent is extremely effective at 'setting up' the adversary for the strike, allowing considerably more control and dominance in making the strike. This is something that is inherently understood and utilized in many classical martial arts, but again is lost or neglected in the modern arts. That neglect is likely due to lack of combative feedback" (Armstrong, *Approach- Close- Entry*, 1). Armstrong further divides combative range into three categories: approach, closing and entry. Approach is the distance of around twenty feet when a threat becomes apparent to either one of both combatants. This is the phase in which tactical movement is performed by both parties as they try gaining a superior position allowing them to utilize both terrain and weapons to maximum effect. This is the point in Richard Kim's account during which the Samurai cursed; he had allowed Yara to arm himself and gain the sandy beaches upward slope.

Closing is when the combatants make their final movements. At this time both are seeking an opening in each other's defense. Timing, agility and perception come into play here, as does presence of mind. Should a fighter move too slow, or be out of sync with the enemy's actions then he or she will be struck down. Moreover, if the combatant does not have the presence of mind allowing him or her to shift direction, thereby avoiding the oncoming attack, the fighter will be struck down. This is the instant when both Yara and the samurai stood facing one another. A brief calm shattered when the samurai attacked and Yari counterattacked, both men's actions were performed with explosive speed and aggression.

Entry is the moment when the attack itself is complete a result of one combatant having been either too slow, unable to shift direction or else not able to make a committed attack. It was at this point that Yara disarmed his attacker and then killed him by crushing his skull with a boat oar.

When applied to empty-handed self defense, the weapon- distance relationship provides us with the reality that not all encounters begin with a simple lapel grab. Hence, our reactions may not be what we imagine, especially where mortal combat is concerned. When speaking of Kobudo's preservation, we are therefore describing something much more profound than just movements executed with wooden weaponry. Instead, we are delineating a complex pattern of behaviors, conveyed by mans need to survive. We can harness these behaviors through kobudo practice and then apply them to other areas of our training, particularly those where unarmed self-defense strategies are concerned.

Kobudo Themes and Applications

As technology and socio-political factors affect the manner in which fighting is conducted both on and off the battlefield, new weapons systems arise to replace those made obsolete by changing circumstances. This process, however, was most apparent when firearms replaced those such as the sword, staff and spear, with which mankind had used for over three thousand years to conduct battle.

As the usefulness of traditional weapons diminished, their practice was conducted for competitive and spiritual reasons, which, with the passage of time, gradually replaced those giving birth to the fighting arts. Whereas the sixteenth century Samurai trained to kill a foe in battle, his modern counterpart usually trains for spiritual enlightenment or competition. And although contemporary exponents are skillful within a modern context, their training often falls short of the classical foundations upon which the Samurai based their skills.

This phenomenon, however, is not just limited to sword based arts but is commonplace in Okinawan kobudo, where one may find exponents practicing with traditional weaponry while giving little, if any, regard to the combative themes involved.

The study of Okinawan Kobudo can be divided into two basic categories: competitive and traditional. Competitive realms are those which gravitate towards aesthetic goals as the weapon becomes an instrument used to win contests. In this environment, it is often the case where a light-weight staff, wooden kama, or hollow nunchuakus are substituted for traditional arms, allowing the competitor to execute faster and more flamboyant routines. While these routines have aesthetic appeal, they embrace little, if any, practical application which, in turn, negates the combative themes deemed so important to the practitioner's physical and mental development.

Traditional studies involve the use of real Kobudo weaponry, the purpose of which is to simulate mortal combat either in solo or two person exercises. Kata practice is the mainstay of traditional kobudo because free- sparring, even with protective equipment, is far too dangerous unless modified weapons are used and rules strictly enforced. Traditional kobudo's focus isn't on aesthetics but on pragmatic techniques and their application. However, it is not uncommon for traditional practitioners to become so engrossed in preserving kobudo

that they overlook the environmental demands which gave rise to the discipline itself. And while the dojo serves as an institute of higher learning, other lessons can be gained outside its walls.

Transcending the Dojo

Although the pipe, fan and hairpin can be employed within confined areas, the majority of kobudo weaponry is intended for outdoor combat. Practically speaking we learn to fight from a distance and then how to close that distance to defeat our opponent.

However, outdoor training also requires the combatant to function on broken terrain, making stances and footwork essential to the practitioner. While one may perform a bo kata with relative ease on a level dojo floor, the same kata executed on a hillside, slippery path, or even broken pavement will require the practitioner to sense with his or her feet. Irregular terrain can also have a two dimensional effect on the engagement's distance, for while on level ground, two opponents armed with staffs will be evenly matched, whereas on a hillside they will not. This is because the fighter in possession of the high slope will have the advantage of being able to strike down upon the foe while the fighter trying to advance up the slope will have their reach of attack shortened by the hillsides upward slant. Thus, not only does the kobudo practitioner have to employ proper technique, but good tactics as well. For while one's surroundings may be of little consideration inside the dojo, tactical use of terrain often contributes more to victory than good technique does outside of the dojo.

Apart from hillsides, outdoor training should be conducted during snow or rain squalls, in mud, amidst forests and during the dead of night. The purpose behind this is for the practitioner to experience environmental demands which evince a much more realistic fighting style. Training conducted outside on uneven terrain produces choppy and forceful actions with broken timing, and there is little about it that is aesthetically pleasing. Even though such qualities contrast greatly with the values of indoor training, their stark nature allows the practitioner to advance beyond the dojo's comfort zone. It is only when the student is afraid of falling on broken terrain, fingers numbed too cold to feel the weapon, or else a hard rain blurs the fighter's vision, that the reality of armed combat makes itself felt. This is the time when the enemy assumes an omnipresent threat requiring one to focus not only on the opponent but on the battleground itself, a process which, in turn, drives the mind-body connection to its highest state and allows one to tap resources which often go unnoticed in the dojo. Other measures one can take to enhance their kobudo training are the following:

- Striking a makiwara or heavy bag with a preferred weapon. This will foster power, focus and control. Often when the only target we hit is empty air, then our responses do not become fully developed. Striking a hard target gets us accustomed to the weapon's recoil- an important factor for

nunchaku exponents- thus teaching us how to regain control after landing a blow has landed. This also aids in the development of wrist, forearm, biceps and shoulder muscles.

- Prior to the Kobudo kata's being taught, basic kobudo kihon should be presented to the student so that he or she can become familiar with their weapon and grow to appreciate its peculiar characteristics. If no Kihon are available, then practitioners should improvise. The sai, tonfa and kama can be used in conjunction with empty-handed kihon to fulfill this role while the staff's basic repertoire of techniques can be head-block, side-block, cross strike, side strike and forward thrust.
- Exponents should use different weapons while practicing technique to see how tactics and applications vary. If only identical weapons are employed during training, such as staff against staff, then one's perspective is limited. Weapons should be intermixed staff against tonfa, kama against nunchaku, etc. to develop a sense of how each weapon's particular characteristics determine the way combat is fought. Over reliance on one weapon hinders skill of arms development which goes against traditional approaches where the man of arms was not a specialist but a generalist able to employ any weapon handed to him.
- Kobudo kata should be practiced empty handed. This is not an uncommon practice, and in some karate systems, there are both empty-hand and kobudo versions of the kata such as Isshinryu, where Kusanku is performed both with and without the sai. This practice enables the karateka to take kobudo concepts and apply them to empty-handed fighting, adding another dimension to training and strengthening the bond between karate and kobudo.

Despite the emphasis placed on competition today, the lessons imparted by traditional kobudo kata are still viable. Through kata we can engage in live weapons training without being injured, learn tactics that deal with all ranges of fighting, and see how combat is affected by the construction of each weapon. These traits are usually absent in competitive realms where kata is executed solo, or else contestants pair off against one another armed with identical weapons.

However, other realizations that go beyond technical expertise are imparted by kobudo training. The sai's thrust and the staff's downward blow prove that there are no guarantees to our survival in mortal combat. This is a valuable lesson, for when we see that death is but a footstep away then the beauty of life is magnified one-thousand fold. It is a realization that gives a deeper essence to our training than what is initially perceived.

Chapter 10

Karate-Zen and the Budo Journey

Hand-to-hand fighting is one of the severest types of combat mankind will engage in. This has been constant throughout history and across all cultural boundaries. In fact, the experience is so demanding that it has prompted man to engage in esoteric rituals designed to protect himself both spiritually and physically. James Frazer wrote about this practice in his timeless classic, *The Golden Bough*: “Once more, warriors are conceived by the savages to move, so to say, in an atmosphere of spiritual danger which constrains them to practice a variety of superstitious observances quite different in their nature from those rational precautions which, as a matter of course, they adopt against foes of flesh and blood. The general effect of these observances is to place the warrior, both before and after victory, in the same state of seclusion or spiritual quarantine in which, for his own safety, primitive man puts his human gods and other dangerous characters” (Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 244).

The process described by Frazer has led to the intertwining of esoteric practices within the martial arts, a practice common in both eastern and western traditions. Though the Christian knight and Japanese samurai came from differing societies, the esoteric rituals they engaged in prior to combat achieved the same purpose: spiritual reinforcement. Not only did they gain mental strength, but they were also transformed into more formidable opponents because the warrior who has no fear of death will undertake challenges the uninitiated would never consider. It was from such a mindset, and the disciplined required attaining it, that other benefits dealing with one’s character and self-realization arose from martial arts training.

The acquisition of character development through martial arts training is found the world over, yet the one country most noted for it is Japan. Japanese society evolved from a hunting and agricultural lifestyle, and by the Heian period (794-1184), Japan had become divided into warring clans, two of the strongest being the Taira and Minamoto. It was during this turbulent period that the *bushi*, or *samurai* as they known today, grew.

With the bushi’s rise came systematic teachings of weapons fighting based on the spear, sword and halberd. During the Kamakura era (1185-1367), these teachings were consolidated into ryu-ha, or martial traditions, which became the standard method of transmitting Bujutsu.

For the samurai, regular Bujutsu (Martial Arts) training was a prerequisite to survival on the battlefield. In conjunction with Bujutsu was Budo, or the Martial Way, a process by which one’s Bujutsu training transcended physical technique, becoming a path of self-realization and spiritual development. The suffix *Bu* refers to martial and, when used in

conjunction with *jutsu* or art, it denotes martial art. But when *Bu* (martial) is used in conjunction with *do*- way, the term denotes martial way, a practice that transcends combative themes that strives for self-enlightenment. This relationship was inseparable during classical times, but as Japan entered the modern world, the Budo-Bujutsu relationship changed.

With the long standing peace of the Tokugawa era prevailing martial attitudes deviated from their traditional courses, a process accentuated by government concerns over the Samurai's restless spirit, and a proliferation of firearms on the battlefield. By the late seventeenth century many warriors found themselves unemployed, which raised the question of how to sustain their fighting skills, while channeling their martial prowess in a positive manner.

Born out of the harsh realities of war, Ken-jutsu had, by the sixteenth century, evolved into a system of sword fighting second to none on the world's battlefields. Yet, during the Tokugawa period, the sword became an instrument used for means other than combat. As such, Ken-jutsu (sword art) gave rise to Kendo (sword way) a discipline through which the samurai could engage in a martial activity while at the same time, refrain from committing acts of wanton violence. Kendo's training was orientated not for war, but for the moral equivalent to war, or, as Michael L. Raposa observed, "If an ascetic discipline can be conceived not simply as an alternative to military training but, rather, as itself constituting a form of military activity, then its power to excite emotions and motivate the will is enhanced. Here, what is added to the ascetic practice is the idea of war. On this view, spiritual practice is always already a martial discipline; at the same time, the idea of war is itself transformed, as the concept of enemy and strategies for fighting must be reformulated." (Raposa, *Meditation and the Martial Arts*, 121) This change in training philosophy helped bring forth what is known today as the classical Budo, or the martial ways.

The Classical Budo

The classical Budo are martial disciplines, technically related to the classical Bujutsu but whose philosophy emphasizes character development over the pursuit of martial prowess. While the Bujutsu strive for combative effectiveness, discipline, and moral character, the classical Budo stress moral character, discipline and aesthetics. The process of separating these two endeavors was far from uniform, as the terms Budo and Bujutsu continued to be used in a utilitarian manner. However, by the late eighteenth century, the classical Budo had manifested distinct practices which, while drawn from Bujutsu, encompassed their own training doctrines. A few of these systems are Kendo (way of the sword) derived from Kenjutsu (Sword art), Iaido (way of drawing the Sword) from Iaijutsu (Art of drawing the sword) and Kyudo (Way of Archery) from Kyujutsu (Art of Archery). Likewise Zen precepts became intertwined in classical Budo training. The classical budo were designed so that through dedicated practice, the practitioner will achieve *Satori*, (enlightenment) a concept borrowed from Zen Buddhist teachings. Moreover Budo, as with Zen, stressed that the highest level of achievement occurred when one met a situation with a clear mind and

then physically responded free of all technical barriers. D.T. Suzuki clarified the Zen-Budo relationship, noting that when the sword is in the hands of a technician-swordsman skilled in its use, it is no more than an instrument with no mind of its own. What it does is done mechanically, and there is no *myoyo* discernible in it. But when the sword is held by the swordsman whose spiritual attainment is such that he holds it as though not holding it, it is identified with the man himself, it acquires a soul, it moves with all the subtleties which have been imbedded in him as a swordsman. The man emptied of all thoughts, all emotions originating from fear, all sense of insecurity, all desire to win, is not conscious of using the sword; both man and sword turn into instruments in the hands, as it were, of the unconscious, and it is this unconscious that achieves wonders of creativity. It is here that swordplay becomes an art.” (Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 146)

With the 250 year peace of the Tokugawa period the classical Budo’s technical prowess began diminishing. Kendo was one of the first systems affected since broken terrain was no longer encountered during practice, a result of training being largely conducted inside. As combative effectiveness yielded to character development, other system’s deficiencies became noticeable. E.J. Harrison a long time Judoka, who first made his way to Yokohama in 1897, documented this in Kyu-do when he wrote the following:

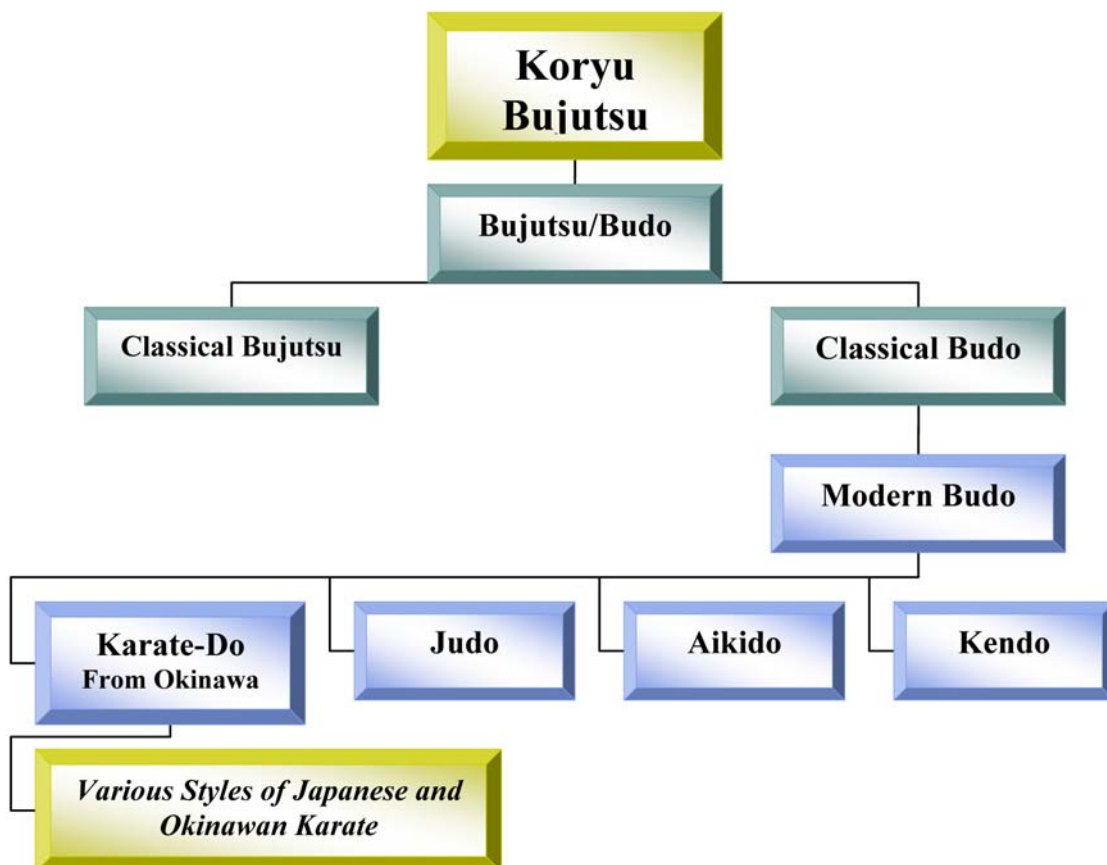
Without attempting to enter into a technical description of how the bow is used in Japan, I am safe in saying that there is a right way and a wrong way of holding it, fitting the arrow, drawing and releasing it. And in this context I can still remember the real distress experienced by the burly proprietor on those occasions, not infrequent, when some of my foreign companions and I fitted the arrow on the wrong side of the bow and held the bow in the incorrect position. One of these companions, a fellow-journalist on a local foreign paper, now, alas, no more, was an incorrigible offender in this respect. What added to the enormity of his offences was that in spite of these-so to speak-arch heresies, he always got nearer to the bull’s-eye than the Japanese habitués who never drew a bow without having conscientiously indulged in a number of preliminary flourishes such as baring their good right arms by throwing back their ample sleeves over their shoulders, raising the bow with a spasmodic gesture, and so forth. It was really heartrending to note the persistency with which they missed after all this elaborate ceremonial: but I think I am right in saying that they themselves would far rather have missed, and the proprietor would far rather have had them miss in proper form than score by such irregular practices as those indulged in by my friend who, with a cigar between his teeth, the bow held horizontally instead of perpendicularly, and the arrow on the wrong side, would wing his shafts into the very centre of the target with a monotonous frequency which afforded him unalloyed satisfaction and the unhappy and orthodox proprietor ineffable disgust. (Harrison, *Fighting Spirit*, 25)

And yet, despite the technical deficiencies involved, the classical disciplines still exhibited martial artistry when used by astute warriors. The story of the forty-seven ronin, whose vendetta in 1703 avenged their lord's death, affirms this as does the efficiency of jujutsu systems evolving after the eighteenth century. Therefore, while the classical Budo may not have been functional on pre-Tokugawa battlefields, their practice during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did afford a reasonable means of self-defense. And in keeping with tradition, the classical warrior's spirit was carried over into Budo, thereby allowing its practitioners to develop a quasi-martial ethos in their training.

Karate the New Budo

In Japan the Classical Budo and Bujutsu's appeal began dwindling during the early Meiji period (1868-1912), a time when these traditions were deemed inadequate to confront international threats. This lack of interest was accelerated by popular opinion which, stemming from a growing infatuation with western ideas, considered the classical fighting arts outdated and anarchistic. Thus, as the Japanese mindset changed, its new values gave rise to the Gendai or modern Budo systems, disciplines practiced by the commoner. Though some modern Budo evolved from classical disciplines others, such as karate, were introduced to Japan and then modified to meet the modern Budo's criteria.

The Following Chart Shows the progression from Budo and Bujutsu as a unified concept to the emergence of the Modern Budo and its relationship to karate.



The modern Budo's philosophies contrasted with their predecessors. Where as classical Budo stressed character development, discipline and aesthetics, modern Budo's goals were not so well defined. Many styles stressed discipline and character-development, but entwined within this were other ideologies that varied from style to style, particularly so in karate.

Karate (Tode-jutsu) was officially recognized by the Dai Nippon Butoku-kai as a Budo tradition in 1933. With this recognition its name became karate-do, or '*way*' of the empty-hand, meaning that its practice transcended all combative realms. The definition of '*Do*' however, varied among its practitioners as did its use. Some defined the '*way*' in a sports-based fashion believing that only through competition could one develop a healthy body and mind. Others, like Funakoshi, interpreted karate -do' as a path of self-realization, comparable to a Zen koan, where the greatest opponent was one's self, not their fellow man.

Despite these ambiguities, both doctrines embraced the belief that through dedicated and austere training, one could forge character and develop an intense self-realization. Thus Karate's martial ethos was employed for something other than combat, a development which allowed the fighting art to become a moral equivalent to war and gave its practitioners a means to expunge destructive emotions; thoughts that might otherwise prove harmful to someone, or society at large. This is in spite of the Butoku-kai's militaristic agenda.

Karate and the Attainment of Zen

Modern theories often promote karate as evolving from Zen-Buddhism. Although karate embraces philosophical doctrines its association with Zen-Buddhism is a modern occurrence, taking place in the twentieth century. Additionally, when examining the relationship between Zen and karate, the difference between Zen consciousness and Zen Buddhism should be established to ascertain that karate is a secular practice.

Zen consciousness is an original, creative state, free of distractions. It is an experience peculiar to each person, and while attainable through karate, this does not mean that it was induced by Buddhist teachings. Nor is Zen consciousness exclusive to the martial arts and Japanese culture, rather it can be attained through other rituals, such as dance, prayer and calligraphy. Thus, what the dancer calls unity of body and mind the karate-ka describes as Zen.

Zen Buddhist philosophies were transmitted to China around 525 A.D. by the Indian monk Bodhidharma. A brusque man, also known as "the blue eyed barbarian," Bodhidharma and his origins remain a mystery. He could have been of the Indian Brahmin or Warrior caste, or he may have come from Persia. After arriving in China, Bodhidharma was asked by Emperor Liang, a Buddhist:

"What merit have I gained through my good works?"

“None,” replied Bodhidharma.”

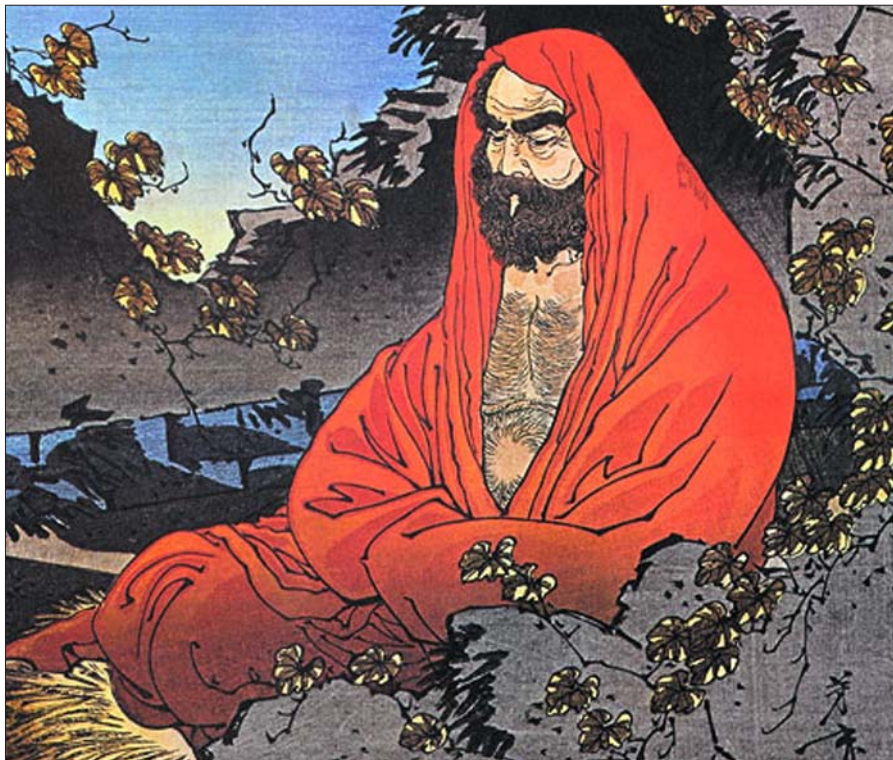
“What is the essence of Buddhism?”

“Vast emptiness, nothing holy,” replied Bodhidharma.

“Who addresses me in such a manner?” demanded Liang, infuriated with the monk’s brusqueness.

“Not known,” answered Bodhidharma. (Buddhist Society, *Buddhist Wisdom*, 72-73)

His initial teachings rejected, Bodhidharma retreated to the Shaolin Monastery where he taught fellow monks Buddhism. Much later, after his death, Bodhidharma’s teachings served as the foundation upon which Zen Buddhism would be built. Vietnamese Zen master, Thich Nhat Hanh observed about the transformation of Indian thoughts into Chinese beliefs that “There are important differences between the Indian mentality and the Chinese mentality that gave birth in China to the form of Buddhism called Zen. The Chinese are very practical people. Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism reflect this. The declaration made by Bodhidharma on his arrival in China has become the foundation of the Zen Buddhist tradition, because this tradition corresponds so well to the pragmatic nature of the Chinese” (Nhat Hanh, *Zen Keys*, 103). From China, Zen Buddhism spread to Korea and then to Japan where it split between the two sects of Soto and Rinzai, with Rinzai gaining popularity among the Samurai class. Zen’s pragmatic nature appealed strongly to warriors who viewed life with a steady measure.



Bodhidharma

Zen Buddhism was first introduced to Okinawa during the thirteenth century when a Japanese priest named Zenkan was shipwrecked on the island. He constructed a small temple at Urasoe near Shuri, named the Gokuraku-ji, and by the fifteenth century, several more Buddhist temples had been established. Nevertheless the religion didn't flourish and the seventeenth century saw a sharp decline due to a lack of public interest and the Satsuma who suppressed the its practice on Okinawa. Shoshin Nagamine wrote that, "Zen philosophy had a profound impact on the development of martial arts on mainland Japan. However, in the old Ryukyu Kingdom it had little if any impact on local self-defense disciplines because of Satsuma's prohibition on such practices. For example, *shingitai* (mind, technique, and body) is the ideal training precept for martial arts, but, in the case of pre-Meiji Okinawans, little emphasis was placed on such spiritual practices (*shin*) because of harsh political restrictions. To recognize this historical phenomenon is to understand how and why such overemphasis was placed on physical conditioning and practical application. By the time of the Meiji (1868-1912) and Taisho (1912-25) periods, karate training, a discipline void of the spiritual element, came to reflect this physical orientation. Most, if not all, teachers of karate placed more emphasis on *kakedameshi* (fighting) than they ever did on the inward journey." (Nagamine, *Okinawa's Great Masters*, p.121) Thus, Nagamine's statement, while debunking the myth of Zen Buddhism's being karate's progenitor, raises the question of how Zen relates to karate.

Often explained in mystical terms, Zen is a state of consciousness intrinsic to the human body, brought forth by neuromuscular responses that accompany meditation and ritualized patterns of movement. William H. McNeill stated about this process:

The primary seat of bodily response to rhythmic movement is apparently situated in the sympathetic and para-sympathetic nervous systems. These nerve complexes are involved in all emotions; but exact paths of emotional excitation by the sympathetic nervous system and of compensatory restoration of bodily homeostasis by the para-sympathetic nervous system are not understood. Various hormones excreted by the pituitary gland and by other organs of the body play a role: so do the hypothalamus, the amygdala, and the right side of the cerebral cortex. Only after filtering through these levels of the brain does excitation derived from rhythmic muscular movement and voicing reach the left side of the brain, where our verbal skills are situated.

With such a pathway of response to rhythmic muscular movement, it is no wonder that our words fumble when seeking to describe what happens within us when we dance or march. (McNeill, *Keeping Together in Time*, 6)

Therefore, while each karate-ka can attain Zen through kata practice, the experience will vary from one individual to another. Nadel and Strauss observed about a similar transition found in dance: "If we look at meditation as a form of deep and continuous concentration or focus on a single sound, image or idea, the dancer, like the religious person, can approach a meditative state both in class and performance. This state is similar in all the arts and is

like the flowing current felt in most situations of deep focused concentration” (Nadel-Straus, *The Dance Experience*, 141).

As a result of what Nadel-Straus describe as the Dance Experience, when one considers the deeper realms of kata practice, it is easily seen why Zen Buddhism and karate are often equated as one and the same by many westerners, particular so when both traditions often employ similar, if not the same, rhythmic patterns of breathing. .

Achieving Zen consciousness through kata is one of the highest levels of Karate-do training, for this is when the exponent attains a profound self realization, which ultimately leads to *Satoi* (enlightenment). Consequently, repetition of this experience enhances a person’s character as William James explains in his *The Varieties of Religious Experience* stating that “Mystical states, strictly so-called, are never merely interruptive. Some memory of their content always remains, and a profound sense of their importance. They modify the inner life of the subject between the times of their recurrence” (James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 416). Hence, through kata we begin to experience Zen consciousness outside of our training and in doing so embrace life with a creative focus, free of destructive thoughts.

Although neighbors in a small community, the strongest indicators of Zen Buddhism’s influence on karate are after its transmission to Japan. There the relationship was established by Karate-ka who sought to invest their fighting art with a deeper philosophical base. This often entailed borrowing ideas and philosophies from the classical Budo and Bujutsu, as well as from Zen Buddhism.

Legendary karate master, Gichin Funakoshi, was a frequent visitor to the Engaku-ji Temple in Kamakura, which was one of the oldest Rinzaï Zen temples in Japan. Rinzaï Zen, which appealed to the warrior class, is noted for stressing expediency, intuition and preparedness for death in its teachings. Funakoshi embraced these tenets and stressed the value of Zen in karate when he wrote, “The *kara* that means ‘empty’ is definitely the more appropriate. For one thing, it symbolizes the obvious fact that this art of self-defense makes no use of weapons, only bare feet and empty hands. Further, students of Karate-do aim not only toward perfecting their chosen art but also toward emptying heart and mind of all earthly desire and vanity. Reading Buddhist scriptures, we come across such statements as ‘Shiki-soku-ze-ku’ and ‘Ku-soku-zeshiki,’ which literally mean, ‘matter is void’ and ‘all is vanity.’ The character *ku*, which appears in both admonitions and may also be pronounced *kara*, is in itself truth.” (Ibid. p.35) Funakoshi went on to state that the Zen state can be attained through the practice of all martial arts, not merely one: “Thus, although the martial arts are many and include such diverse forms as judo, fencing, archery, spear fighting and stick fighting, the ultimate objective of all of them is the same as that of karate. Believing with the Buddhists that it is emptiness, the void, that lies at the heart of all matter and of all creation, I have steadfastly persisted in the use of that particular character

in my naming of the martial art to which I have given my life.” (Funakoshi, *Karate-Do My Way of Life*, 35)

Funakoshi was not the only person to incorporate Zen-Buddhist philosophies into Karate. Shoshin Nagamine was well known for the incorporation of Zazen (Zen Meditation) into his teachings. Nagamine, whose search for enlightenment grew out of the devastation wrought upon Okinawa during World War II, was influenced by the works of Miyamoto Musashi and Teshu Yamaoka. Similarly, Nagamine’s study of Zen Buddhism led him to consider Zen consciousness and karate as one in the same, a realization which helped him transcend physical technique and see karate as a means to promote world peace.

Nagamine’s incorporation of Zazen into karate is not a singular incident and can be found in Japan, Okinawa and the West. Zazen, sitting mediation, can be used to enhance one’s focus, but its practice is often dependent upon the karate-ka and their religious views, for while Zazen may be endorsed in Japan, its acceptance in Western cultures varies owing to pre-existing religious beliefs. Yet Zazen does not make karate a religion, nor does it make Zen consciousness a religion for as D.T. Suzuki explained, “Is Zen a religion? It is not a religion in the sense that the term is popularly understood; for Zen has no God to worship, no ceremonial rites to observe, no future abode to which the dead are destined, and, last of all, Zen has no soul whose welfare is to be looked after by someone else and whose immortality is a matter of intense concern with some people. Zen is free from all these dogmatic and ‘religious’ encumbrances” (Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 9).

Thus, Zen consciousness is a tool the karate-ka uses to develop skill, increase perception and build character. Its attainment is not easy because of the cathartic process involved. Nevertheless, that is karate-do, the instant when we break through our self-imposed barriers and win the battles inside of us.

Chapter 11

Karate: Sport or Self-Defense

Combative sports have been practiced throughout history and by all societies. Wrestling and boxing are found in the annals of most ancient cultures, and their practice often complemented martial arts training. In both Ancient China and Greece wrestling was considered a prerequisite for developing martial skill, and Tegumi (Okinawan wrestling) was used by many of karate's progenitors to enhance their strategies.

Every combative sport has rules which determine a contest's nature and reflect a given society's moral values. Therefore, while killing an opponent during a Pankration bout in Ancient Greece may have been considered appropriate, the same result produced during an Olympic Judo match today would be considered horrific. Furthermore, the rules of engagement particular to a contest are what imbue a sport with its physical identity. Judo is judo because it is a grappling- based art. Boxing assumes its identity because it is a striking art that excludes ground grappling. Therefore, it is not a matter of which is the superior system, boxing or judo, but which one is best suited for the rules of engagement. Thus, while the boxer would be disadvantaged during Judo randori, the Judoka would be at an equal disadvantage if forced to compete by the rules governing boxing.

The relationship between combative sports, martial, and civil styles of fighting is a complementary one, although the strongest bonds are found between civil and sport styles, since both can be used for either self-defense or competition. In 1954, Martial Arts author and long time Judoka, Charles Yerkow, Kodokan 2nd Dan, wrote about Judo's self-defense role: "There is no definite rule as to what constitutes self-defense in judo since most of the moves begin as a defense and then face-about and become scientific attacks. If you are attacked and you kick your antagonist in the most haphazard manner you have defended yourself; if someone aims an automatic at you and you beat him to the fire, you have again defended yourself" (Yerkow, *Modern Judo*, 107). Likewise, even the most self-defense orientated styles of karate can be used in free sparring, provided the right amount of safety equipment is worn, and rules are observed preventing dangerous strikes.



The Sport of Boxing

The following graph shows the similarities and dissimilarities between civil fighting arts and combative sports.

	Combative Sport	Civil Fighting Art
Use of Weapons:	Sometimes	Yes
Competition:	Yes	Sometimes
Intended for Mortal Combat:	No	Yes
Meditation:	Yes	Yes
Protective Equipment:	Sometimes	Sometimes
Relies on Lethal Techniques:	No	Yes
Singular Opponent:	Yes	Yes
Multiple Opponents:	No	Yes
Stresses Character Development:	Yes	Yes
Systems Purpose:	Winning	Self-protection
Sense of Fair Play:	Always	Sometimes
Free Sparring:	Yes	Yes
Rule Dominated:	Yes	No
Requires Physical Stamina:	Yes	Yes
Used By:	All Classes	All Classes

Much of the confusion surrounding karate's role as a sport or system of self-defense comes from the practice of free-sparring. This debate originated when western style boxing was introduced to Japan, stirring the imagination of a society long accustomed to grappling. Boxing became a nation wide phenomenon during the 1920's and 30's, with clubs being established in Japanese military academes and colleges. Boxing's popularity helped promote karate free-sparring which by 1950, was the accepted way of developing technical skill within many karate dojos. Yet it was the nature of free-sparring that determined whether karate was practiced as a sport or system of self-defense.

Ippon kumite (one step sparring) embraces a one strike- one kill philosophy which is conceivable if performed with a katana, but daunting when attempted empty-handed. Yet, this philosophy was carried over into point-sparring, where each technique scored came to signify a killing blow. And while some karate-ka viewed point-fighting as a complete entity, others like Kyokushinkai founder Masutatsu Oyama, considered free-sparring fought full contact, a better alternative for developing self-defense skills.

The debate over which style of sparring was best, point or full-contact, soon led to differing camps emerging in karate. One, modern sport karate embraced point-style fighting, while more conventional teachings, emphasized dialogue of technique through free-fighting in conjunction with the practice of kata bunkai. However, point-style fighting gained initial prominence since it was widely accepted in karate tournaments throughout Japan. Consequently, tournament champions were sent abroad to teach karate, which often resulted in the fighting art being presented to the West as a semi-contact sport, instead of a self-defense system.⁽¹⁶⁾

With karate's introduction to the United States, point-sparring soon became the preferred way of fighting because of its fast paced nature and popularity in tournaments. Yet despite sport karate's technical deficiencies, point-sparring was originally a rough affair fought on hard floors. It was a style of fighting requiring superb physical conditioning, and many point fighters of the 1960's had trained in Judo and boxing, thus their skills were well rounded. Likewise dojo sparring, that which was conducted outside of the tournament ring, proved to be equally demanding, yet often a far more brutal style of fighting, as karate-ka fought bare-knuckles using punches, kicks, elbows, throws and take-downs all performed on hard wood, or concrete floors.

Karate's competitive era during the years between 1963 until 1979 is considered by many to be the fighting art's "blood and guts" age, both in the west and Japan. And despite rules being established to promote safe competition only the hardest fighters generally competed in what was often an all out brawl between two contestants. Corcoran and Farkas wrote about this period that "Excessive contact was grounds for disqualification. Despite this general rule, heavy contact to both the face and body was so common that competitors and officials alike appeared to accept it. The techniques, crude and calamitous by today's standards, were as unrefined as the rules governing the infant sport. A fighter might break an opponent's bones or knock him into the grandstand and not be disqualified. If he was a true fighter, the opponent was expected to come back and dish out the same punishment he had received." (Corcoran-Farkas *Original Martial Arts Encyclopedia* p.251)

The mid-1970's, saw the rise of full-contact karate as champions like Joe Lewis, Bill Wallace and Benny Urquidez fought their way to international stardom using a blend of traditional karate kicks, western boxing punches and Muay Thai principles. A rough, demanding sport, full-contact karate saw the mixing of western style boxing with karate. This intercourse produced a style of fighting whose rhythm and techniques differed with traditional venues. And once again karate assumed a new identity as it evolved to meet the demands of a new culture.

Likewise, with the invention of foam safety equipment, during the mid-1970s, the effects of point-fighting increased ten-fold on traditional karate. This too, brought forth changes in the fighting arts practice which redefined it as a sport. The progression from traditional kata and kumite being one entity, to the sport realms of the 1950's was a dramatic separation

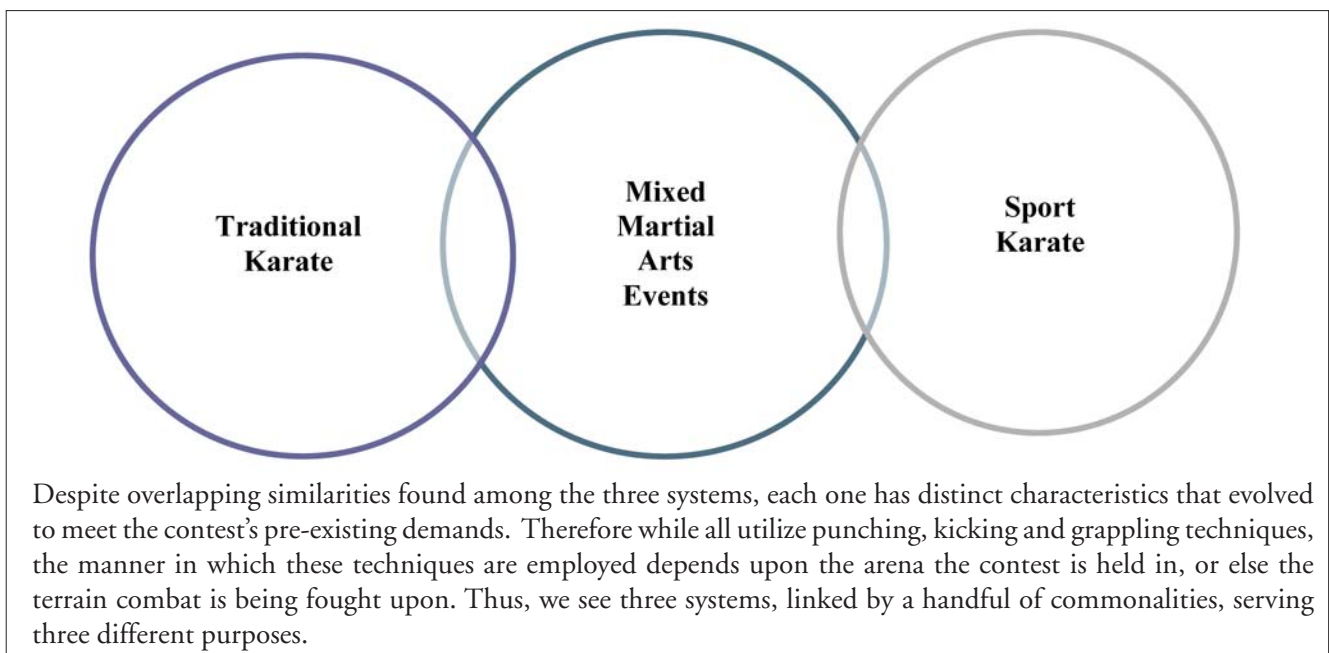
of karate's ideologies. However, safety chop not only separated karate from its traditional bonds with kata, since opponents now fought at longer ranges and could not grapple, but it brought forth a new style of fighting, tournament tagging.

Tagging occurs when a fighter's reach is extended by letting the safety punch slip down their forearm, so that an opponent can be tagged with the glove's tip, rather than hit with a solid fist. It is a tactic based on speed and visual effect, leaving no time for officials to consider its viability. Tagging tactics became common place in tournaments during the 1970's and 80's and as the popularity of point-sparring soared, the flick of the fist or foot was widely accepted as legitimate technique, a belief contrasting greatly with the doctrines of self-defense and full-contact fighting.

The Reality of UFC

With the rise of Mixed Martial Arts contests in the 1990's, traditional karate was deemed by many people an inefficient style of fighting. This was a result of matches that pitted point sparring, traditional and full contact karate systems against UFC jujutsu styles. During these contests, the deficiencies of point-style fighting became apparent, and even some traditionalists were forced to accept the maxim of Choki Motobu when he stated, "The techniques of kata were never developed to be used against a professional fighter, in an arena or on the battlefield. They were, however, most effective against someone who had no idea of the strategy being used to counter their aggressive behavior" (Nagamine, *Okinawa's Great Masters*, 96).

Contributing to this *coup de theatre* was the fact that all contests were held by UFC rules. Therefore, no matter what the fighting style, point, traditional or full contact karate, it had to conform to the rules of combat governing the UFC events. And just like the baseball pitcher who suddenly found himself playing defensive end for the Chicago Bears, so was it for many karate-ka whose strategies were negated by the rules governing the new game.



The modern comparison between MMA and karate is a longstanding deliberation that has existed for almost a century. When first introduced to Japan, karate was almost immediately compared to Judo, Sumo and western boxing, and, ironically, many who believed karate the superior fighting art, were westerners. E.J. Harrison acknowledged karate's preeminence as follows: "First then as to the name itself: '*Kara*' means empty and '*te*' means hand, i.e. to combat with empty hands, without lethal weapons. In this respect then karate resembles both jujutsu and judo. But as a purely 'fighting art', designed to dispose of an enemy in the shortest possible time with no means barred, I think we must admit that it transcends them both in its deadly efficacy. And why this should be so will appear from the fact that a single karate technique, if executed in earnest, is capable of inflicting fatal injury upon its victim more surely and speedily than either jujutsu or judo" (Harrison, *The Fighting Spirit of Japan*, 74).

Harrison's glowing appraisal of karate provides valuable insight into much more than victories won or lost in the full contact arena. Instead, his acknowledgment of karate's resemblance to judo and jujutsu indicates that early karate practitioners possessed both standup and ground grappling skills, a detail often ignored in many dojos today.

In the modern vernacular traditionalists state "*I study karate, therefore I am a fighter,*" a phraseology contrasting the views of men such as Choki Motobu who probably would have said, "*I am a fighter, and for that reason karate exists*". Early karate evolved from a spirit of eclecticism that allowed each fighter to give rise to their own system. Moreover when one considers the close association between karate and Tegumi, then it should come as no surprise that many Okinawan karate-ka were evenly skilled in both stand up and ground fighting. Hence they could brawl both equally well in and out of the arena. Therefore, it was circumstance which governed how they fought, not style. In rule dominated combat the Okinawan karate-ka performed at a different level of intensity, than they would have during mortal combat. Likewise, the versatility of the Okinawan martial traditions allowed Okinawan fighters to function equally well, both in and out of the arena.

Ironically, it was the adaptability of early karate fighters, like Choki Motobu, which helped contribute to the modern distortion of karate's identity. Then, as is the case today with comparisons of diverse fighting arts, the rules of engagement governing the particular types of combat were ignored while the different fighting arts were all lumped into one category, based on commonalities found among them. This is despite judo, boxing and karate having evolved in different cultures and for different types of combat. Hence it was not the victorious fighter who gained the most notoriety, but his style of fighting. This led to the belief that it was the style of karate which produced the fighter, instead of the fighter giving rise to the particular brand of fighting. ⁽¹⁷⁾

The generic comparison of karate to other fighting arts continues today, and it leads many people to believe one system superior when, in actuality, each style reigns supreme in its own environment. The following is a brief assessment of several combative sports traditional

karate is frequently judged by, their strengths, weaknesses, and how the karate-ka can benefit from cross training in these sports.

Mixed Martial Arts: This is a full contact match fought between two opponents, on a safe surface, without weapons and minus killing techniques. These rules ensure that fighters can execute full-force strikes against one another while providing a limited degree of safety. The contests fought in MMA are tough affairs requiring contestants to be in prime shape. They are not for everyone, nor are they intended to be since the majority of MMA fighters are in their twenties.

Mixed Martial Arts draw heavily upon strategies from Judo and western boxing; it is a combative sport designed for a particular contest. Therefore, technical deficiencies arise when a MMA is applied to combat for which it was not intended. One drawback is that ground grappling, when used on broken pavement or against multiple opponents, can put a fighter at an extreme disadvantage since his or her mobility has been sacrificed. This is a result of MMA strategies revolving around two contestants, instead of multiple opponents, as the case may be in mortal combat. Another deficiency present is the lack of weapons during contests. This omission contrasts with existing trends in violence where weapons are frequently used. For the perspective karate-ka desiring to participate in these events, he or she will have to learn the rules of the game; the contest will not conform to the practitioner's expectations.

Boxing: Western style boxing dates back to the Ancient Greeks and was originally a bloody affair fought with bare knuckles. Some of this brutality was quelled by rules Jack Broughton established in 1743, which forbade hitting a contestant while he was down and grabbing below the waist. In 1867, the Marquess of Queensberry rules were introduced, requiring fighters to wear gloves, and designating that all rounds were to be three minuets in duration. Boxing's strengths are its rapid fire combinations and devastating techniques. These two features allow the boxer to execute an almost unlimited number of punches while either advancing or retreating. Boxing has significantly influenced the development of full-contact fighting in Japan, the United States and Great Britain. It also helped bring forth head punching in the Chinese fighting arts. Robert Smith observed, "Although the Western style contained something for the Chinese-primarily head punching, which the Chinese traditionally had relegated to a lesser position to what they believed was the more grievous body punching" (Smith, *Comprehensive Asian Fighting Arts*, 19). A full contact sport boxing requires tremendous physical stamina, yet it lacks grappling techniques and strategies for combating armed opponents, a result of the rules governing the sport. Despite these deficiencies, western boxing can and has been used effectively for self-defense. Moreover, its rapid fire combinations will augment the karate-ka's own punching capabilities should he or she decide to cross train.

Judo: Developed by Dr. Kano Jigoro (1860-1938), Judo finds its roots in traditional jujutsu. Kano, whom many consider a martial prodigy, began his study of Tenjin Shinyo-ryu jujutsu

at the age of seventeen and in 1882, he founded the Kodokan. Kano's intention was to preserve traditional techniques while at the same time stressing philosophies designed to help students attain self-realization, or the "tao." Hence, the name *judo*, *ju*-denoting soft while *do* designated Kano's system as a Budo discipline. First introduced to America in 1904, Judo has long gone hand in hand with karate training. Many of America's early karate-ka first studied Judo and then later switched to karate as it grew more popular. Grappling is an intense practice that requires overall physical conditioning; therefore Judo can enhance the karate-ka's training by helping him or her develop better stamina and a stronger body. Likewise, Judo's grappling techniques can be incorporated into existing karate strategies, thereby giving the karate-ka a wide base of skills to draw upon. Judo's one draw-back is an over reliance on throwing and grappling techniques, while neglecting striking techniques. Yet this is easily overcome by supplementary training in western boxing, or karate.

Traditional Karate: Karate's legacy as a self-defense art imbues it with strategies designed for stand up grappling, joint locking, throwing one's enemy to the ground and attacking vital areas. Similarly, most techniques can be employed in a lethal manner if the conflict so deems it. Traditional karate's drawbacks are a hesitation to address current trends in violence and an absence of eclecticism which can hinder progressive ideas. Moreover, an overemphasis on point sparring has eroded the combative efficiency of many styles of karate today. Therefore, medium and even full contact fighting should be practiced in order to ensure that proper dialogue of technique is present. Sparring also helps the karate-ka grow accustomed to the stress of combat conditioning the fighter to being hit, a trait necessary for developing realistic self-defense skills.

Point Sparring Styles of Karate: Point sparring is a fast paced, dynamic style of competition that requires quick reflexes, stamina, and superior hand eye coordination. This form of competition has helped make karate popular around the world, and because of the rules governing point sparring, almost anyone, from child to adult, can participate. However, point sparring's technical deficiencies become apparent once it is removed from the tournament. For it is only within the ring's confines that the safety punch's flick is effective. Point sparring has no grappling, nor has it many strategies deemed effective for mortal combat. It is a safe, fun way to spar and can serve as a useful tool for introducing the karate-ka to medium and full-contact styles of fighting. Likewise, point sparring is an excellent way to develop cardio-vascular fitness.

Differing agendas notwithstanding, combative sports, like western boxing and judo, can significantly enhance the traditional karate-ka's skills. Cross training is an inherit theme in karate and has been throughout the fighting arts history. Chojun Miyagi was well versed in both Sumo and Judo, while others of his caliber embarked upon similar journeys. Kenwa Mabuni practiced both Shuri and Naha-te. Otsuka Hidenori (Wado-ryu) was skilled in classical jujutsu, and Masatatsu Oyama (Kyokushinkai) had extensive training in both the Korean and Chinese fighting arts.

Cross training in other styles of fighting such as Judo, Boxing, Aikido or even Tai Chi, will present the karate-ka with different solutions to problems frequently encountered during their karate training. This furthers the development of balanced strategies as contestants become accustomed to using different techniques and rhythms not normally found within their own style of fighting. Cross training is not detrimental to the Karate-ka rather it benefits skills and is in keeping with the spirit of traditional karate. However, a reasonable understanding of karate should be developed before cross training is undertaken; otherwise the student may end up with a lack of appreciation for both styles of fighting.

In addition to its overlapping relationship with combative sports karate training should encompass free sparring, provided it is used in accordance with traditional combative values. This synthesis has been accomplished by many distinguished karate-ka and does exist within certain styles of Japanese and Okinawan karate where medium, and even full contact fighting, are considered essential to the student's development. Yet it is only with a firm understanding of the role traditional kata plays, and the differences between point and combative styles of sparring, that this balance can be achieved. Kata is the practice of strategies to dangerous to be executed free style, while sparring allows one to experience the stress and chaos of hand-to-hand combat. Without this understanding, the results gained from karate can often be of limited value due to the fighter misunderstanding the correlation between kata and sparring.

Self-Defense

No matter what style of karate is practiced, hand-to-hand combat fought against an armed enemy is the worst case scenario one can find himself in, especially if the karate-ka is unarmed. Sadly, this is a likely occurrence today given the preponderance for armed violence in our society. This problem affects not just traditional karate, but all fighting arts, no matter what the style or system may be. The UFC fighter can be killed by a knife thrust to the chest just as easily as the traditional karate-ka. Moreover, in the handgun age, all systems of hand- to- hand fighting are at an equal disadvantage.

Should a weapon be used during an assault, the defendant's chances of survival may diminish as much as ninety percent, depending upon the attacker's own skill. If the assailant is proficient with a knife, then ones chances of survival may decrease as much as eighty percent. If he is armed with a gun, then the defendant's survival rate may decrease as much as 90 to 95 percent, depending upon the type of firearm used. These are depressing facts, but this reality must be confronted when addressing the issue of self-defense. Likewise, it leads one to examine just what the term self-defense implies.

Due to the media's unrealistic portrayal of karate, and our own societies general naivety concerning the demands of hand to hand combat, the term self-defense conjures up images of a lone fighter defeating multitudes of armed opponents, single-handedly, with nothing more than their hands and feet. However, reality is a different manner. From a tactical

standpoint self-defense can mean checking one's car before entering it, or else noticing a threatening character standing in a doorway and then crossing to the other side of the street to avoid him.

Self-defense, when defined from a purely combative standpoint does not mean conquering a gang of thugs, but instead doing whatever it takes to survive the attack, including running. Misconceptions about and the nature of an attack/street fight are as easily entertained within the dojo's safe confines, as they are portrayed on televised UFC matches. Three of the most common misconceptions involve the friendly brawl, the unarmed fight and the notion that all fights go to the ground. Each of these is examined in the following paragraphs.

Friendly Brawl: This illusion often stems from the belief that a code of honor exists between two fighters, allowing them to 'step outside' and settle things like gentlemen. A sense of fair play is associated with the friendly brawl, thus preventing the use of weapons and ensuring that the combatants show respect to one another after the fight is over. In reality, there is nothing friendly about a brawl. Should you be asked to step outside, there's a nine in ten chance that your antagonist is armed, or else has friends waiting to assist them. And, by chance, if you do leave your opponent lying in the gutter, there is a high probability that he will return, and settle the score with handgun. Mortal combat has only one rule, and that is to survive. You should never fight unless it is a last resort, and once the encounter is over, leave as quickly as possible. During a confrontation, violent execution achieves far better results than aesthetic beliefs.

The Unarmed Fight: A weak point commonly found within traditional karate training is the tendency to gear all self-defense towards fighting an unarmed opponent. These scenarios usually begin with either a lapel grab or a straight punch to the face. In actuality, many attacks are conducted with a weapon. The assailant wants to dominate the situation and get the attack over with so as to exit the premises quickly, thereby avoiding arrest. To counter such tactics, as much as 70 percent of the karate-ka's training should be focused on knife, and club attacks. This will not hinder one's empty-hand defenses; rather, it will enhance them. If a practitioner can successfully defend against a weapon, then the same techniques can be used to neutralize empty-hand attacks.

All Fights Go To The Ground: This mantra has been perpetrated by the popularity of MMA events. However, during hand to hand combat, the first person going to the ground is usually the first to be killed. This maxim is thousands of years old and is found in all systems designed for mortal combat, from the ancient Greeks to the United States Marine Corps Martial Arts program. Likewise, the concept of staying afoot is to stay alive is symbolized in the karate-ka's ready or natural stance. Hoplogist Richard Hayes wrote about the combative significance of natural stances, noting that "In the pre-modern professional-of-arms, the 'natural stance' was equidistant between the quick and the dead. This is still valid for modern armies. While we can yet stand we remain viable human beings. When we can no longer stand we are wounded or dead. (Hayes, *Hoplology Theoretics*,

29). Mobility is essential for self defense because it allows the karate-ka to slip, weave, attack and retreat. Without it, one's skills are seriously hindered. Ground grappling, used as a primary tactic within the ring is acceptable, on the street; however, it is the last tactic one wants to resort to. To stay afoot is to say alive, especially when facing an armed attacker.

The techniques and strategies needed to develop effective self-defense are present in karate, but identifying them requires casting off preconceived notions of tradition and embracing a more flexible approach concerned with results, instead of aesthetics. This perspective often entails taking an existing strategy, then modifying it to meet current threats, such as kata joint locking techniques being applied against a knife, instead of an unarmed opponent's fist, or kakie practiced against someone holding a club. Karate has to meet the fight's demands because combat never yields to our expectations. This knowledge has been a tradition throughout the fighting arts history and must remain so today.

Staunch traditionalists may argue that to alter a technique is to break with tradition, thereby degrading karate. Yet in matters of self-defense, karate's progenitors placed a higher regard upon being competent fighters than on preserving set routines. This pragmatic outlook allowed Choki Motobu to reign victorious in Naha's red light district, and it also enabled Chotoku Kyan to use live chickens for purposes of self-defense. Karate Historian, Richard Kim, told the story of Kyan's famous encounter:

One of the hooligans held his sword in front of him in a threatening gesture.

Kyan looked at the hooligan intently and said, 'Well, it looks like money and chickens measured against human life is not much. Okay, if you want the chickens so badly, take them. Here!' And he flung both chickens at the men in front of him.

At the instant he flung the chickens, he jabbed his hands against the two men directly in front of him, poking one in the eye and the other in the throat. Both dropped on the spot. He quickly kicked the sword bearer in the groin and turned to face the hooligan in back of him.

The action happened so fast that when Kyan turned, the hooligan that was standing in the back of him just drew a sharp breath. He looked at Kyan's face and lost his nerve. As Kyan advanced, the tough broke and ran. (Kim, *Weaponless Warriors*, 61).

In the history of karate, there has never been a formal technique for 'flinging chickens' discovered within any of its kata. Nevertheless, this did not stop Chotoku Kyan from employing the roosters to his advantage, as any experienced fighter would have done under similar circumstances.

Today karate is often interpreted as an empty-handed fighting art, with some people believing that any opponent, despite size or propensity to wield weapons, can be defeated

with hand and foot strikes. Yet this idea also differs with traditional karate's self-defense strategies, because using a weapon to defend oneself during mortal combat was considered perfectly acceptable by many of its early legends. Remarking on the use of weapons for personal protection, Chojun Miyagi noted in 1936 that

Our intention is to develop a sound and healthy body so that, in the event we are attacked unexpectedly, we are able to defend ourselves effectively. That is to say, the fundamental principle of karate is to be able to defeat an assailant using solely our natural weapons-our bodies.

However, in situations in which an aggressor possesses superior strength or wields a weapon, we must use, in conjunction with our natural weapons, whatever weapon we may find at hand (Higaonna, *History of Karate*, 82).

For the modern karate-ka, this translates into becoming aware of, or even proficient in, the use of weapons common to our society. Mace, pepper spray, car keys, extendable batons and firearms should be included in the karate-ka's training at some point in time. Familiarity with these modern weapons is not breaking with tradition; rather, it is keeping abreast of present combative themes, a practice that ensures karate's status as a functioning self defense art in the postmodern world.

Although the vast majority of karate-ka today will never have to employ violence to defend themselves, the differences separating karate's sport and combative goals should never be confused. Both share commonalities; however, since no one style of fighting encompasses everything, the two differ in the results they strive for. One is concerned with rule based competition, while the other prepares us for a struggle in which there are no rules save one: survival.

Epilogue

A fighting art evolves from mankind's needs to address specific combative scenarios. This process is influenced by the environment in which it takes place. Therefore, terrain, religious beliefs, social values, body structure and technology become determining factors. Consequently, if the intrinsic values of a society change, so will the fighting art it gave birth to.

Karate is no exception to this evolutionary cycle; in fact, it serves as a good example of the process in action. Born out an agrarian culture's need for self-defense, karate was originally a creative undertaking giving rise to an individual style of fighting. However, when transposed into the industrialized world, karate reflected this conversion. It became rigid and mechanical, as the group, not the individual, assumed the role of qualifier. Yet, despite these ideological shifts, karate remained a dynamic experience which taxed the individual physically, mentally and spiritually through competitive and combative mediums.

With the emergence of the postmodern world and its plethora of electronic media, our society's values have changed immensely over the past thirty years. Today speed is the essence of life, and through modern technology, we can now communicate with anyone and at anytime we please. Much of this ability derives from the internet and its constant stream of information which affect our lives on a daily basis.

In keeping with the changing society, karate has also been affected by this electronic stream of consciousness. The internet now provides an almost limitless source of historical information which in previous decades would have taken months, if not years, for the karate-ka to obtain. However, as karate enters this new phase of its history there are pitfalls to be encountered, one of which is the internet itself.

Despite its technological wonders, the internet is a faceless medium where uneducated opinions can quickly become fact without sustaining evidence. For this reason, misinformation is often accepted at face value, while the resulting damage can be irreversible. Moreover, with the growing popularity of distance learning courses, online instruction, and chat rooms, physical reality is being subtracted from karate. Sven Birkerts, acclaimed author of *The Gutenberg Elegies*, wrote about the impact cyberspace has on our society that, "The adaptation changes us. We respond to the explosion of signals, the demand it creates, by fragmenting ourselves; we learn to delegate our attention in many directions at once, in controlled allotments. Multitasking, we call it. It's amazing how quickly we've accustomed ourselves to this self-partitioning, to the point where any sustained focus feels strangely taxing. Transport the circuit-savvy citizen of the early twenty-first century to a nineteenth-century village, or even a town in mid-twentieth-century America, and he would suffer info-implosion, become disoriented. He would not understand that his new undivided environment was every bit as rich in data as his screen world. To read the

signals-the life-he would need the services of an interpreter” (Birkerts, *Gutenberg Elegies*, 237). The ramifications of such a mindset are immense because, without a sense of reality, and appreciation of the world around us, how can we actualize our karate skills?

Coinciding with the internet is the media’s constant likening of karate to the UFC, which boxing correspondent Bob Mee described as “a young product aimed at a relatively young audience” (Mee, *Bare Fists*, 226). Yet, despite the audience’s lust for violence, fighters like Dutchman Jon Bluming, Randall Cobb, Joe Lewis, and many others of their caliber remain strangers to its ranks. Hence, mainstream opinion is generated by soundbites, and karate is considered passé, by spectators with a limited knowledge of past champions and historical events.

Fortunately, reality differs greatly from popular opinion because karate offers the same rewards today that it did one hundred years ago. A multidimensional endeavor containing sport, combative and spiritual realms, karate helps us develop sound bodies during our early years, serves as an excellent form of stress relief for the middle-aged practitioner, and reduces the effects of aging on those in their golden years.

No, it is not the tradition which is at fault, but the perceptions we have about it. Therefore, to appreciate karate we should do as Thomas Moore said, “Tear down our monasteries so that we can see the sun rise at dawn”.

End Notes

1 - Historian Richard Humble observed about the Japanese navy that, “And they were canny shoppers. The ships of the Japanese battle fleet which took on the Russian Far Eastern Fleet in 1904 were made of the best that money could buy – Krupp armour and British engines and guns were the norm, although components and equipment were purchased from many other foreign firms. (Humble, Japanese High Seas Fleet, p.14)

2 - “An important feature of emotional bonding through rhythmic muscular movement is that it affects those who take part in it more or less independently of how they may have been connected (or divided) by prior experience” (McNeill, Keeping Together in Time, p.52).

3 - Martial Arts historian Donn Draeger wrote about the Tashio era “The problem of self-realization, as portrayed by the Taisho writers, was not one of control but of release of inn forces. Man learns what he is by liberating his natural desires, especially his sexual desires, from the constraints of social mores. Such traditional practices as classical budo, already ignored in the Meii era, were now regarded as completely anachronistic; the spiritual nature of classical budo ran contrary to the liberal expression of the self. The public preferred instead to engage in less exacting pastimes, such as sports.” (Draeger, Modern Budo-Bujutsu, 37-38)

4 - Adolf Hitler, ruler of Nazi Germany, also utilized western boxing in a similar fashion. Hitler believed that boxing developed a spirit of aggressiveness and made German youths “tough as leather” as he wrote in Mein Kampf. Boxing became a nation wide phenomenon in Nazi Germany but with Joe Louis’s defeat of Max Schmeling during their famous rematch bought, which lasted only 124 seconds, the sport’s popularity dwindled amongst Nazi officials.

5 - (Bishop, Okinawan Karate, 56)

6 - (Nagamine, Okinawan’s Great Masters, 55)

7 - By the end of World War II, the Banzai charge was used only as a last ditch resort. In the fight for Edson’s ridge on Guadalcanal, September 1942, General Kyotatke Kawaguchi’s force of 2100 men was decimated as they charged, banzai style, up a hillside towards positions defended by Marine Raiders and Parachutists under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Merritt A. Edson. This is not the only instance of the Japanese being slaughtered while conducting a Banzai charge, the same also happened on Tarawa, Saipan and Peleliu. As a result of the horrendous casualties suffered during these attacks Japanese strategies dictated by 1944, that troops should remain in fortified bunkers and expose their selves to the American firepower only as a last resort. Thus, the reason why on both Iwo Jima and Okinawa, Japanese forces chose to remain in their fortifications rather than sally forth as they had earlier during the war.

8 - (Higaonna, The History of Karate, 38)

9 - (Motobu, Okinawa Kempo, 25)

10 - Hironori Otsuka (1892-1982) was not a native Okinawan, nor had he trained in karate prior to its introduction to Japan. Otsuka was, however, a respected Shindo Yoshin Ryu jujutsu practitioner. He had trained in the system since childhood and received his menkyo (license of proficiency) in his late 20’s. He began studying karate with Gichin Funakoshi in 1922, but later branched off to form the Wado-ryu style of karate, a synthesis of his own martial arts background and what he had learned from Funakoshi. Otsuka shunned several of the traditional training methods being used by karate-ka at the time believing

that toughening ones knuckles, and other areas of the body, served no real purpose in fight. He was an early advocate of the relaxed arm punch and stressed defense against unarmed and armed attacks in his teachings.

11 - (Funakoshi, Karate-Do Nyumon,43)

12 - (McCarthy, Ancient Okinawan Martial Arts Vol. 2, 33)

13 - Donn Draeger gives further insight into the differences between the two methodologies stating that, "Two aspects differentiate the shinsei budo from the classical ones. First, they are always exercised as sport activities. Secondly, whereas the classical forms depend upon the deliberate placement of technical hurdles on which to constitute the foundation of their disciplines, the shinsei budo forms tend toward the removal of as many technical hurdles as possible. Thus in the classical disciplines, the trainee is required to deal with a great variety of technical difficulties, the nature of which generates the process of spiritual forging called, seishin tanren. This is necessary to the goal of enlightenment of self-perfection. In the shinsei budo forms, however, the trainee is guided so that he may become physically skillful in the shortest possible period of time" (Draeger, Modern Budo Bujutsu, 9).

14 - "that as man gradually became erect, and continually used his hands and arms for fighting with sticks and stones, as well as for the other purposes of life, he would have used his jaws and teeth less and less. The jaws, together with their muscles, would then have become reduced through disuse, as would the teeth through the not well understood principles of correlation and the economy of growth; for we everywhere see that parts which are no longer of service are reduced in size." (Darwin p.324-325)

15 - Patrick McCarthy remarked about this martial influence from the Japanese perspective that, "This phenomenon clearly illustrates how the principles of combat were ingeniously applied to occupationally related implements and then unfolded into a folk tradition, not unlike that of Okinawa's civil combative heritage nearly a century before. When I asked the eleventh-generation Jigen-ryu headmaster Togo Shigemasa about this potential link, he said, 'There can be no question that Jigen-ryu is connected to Okinawa's domestic fighting traditions; however, the question remains, which influenced which!'" (McCarthy, Ancient Okinawan Martial Arts Vol.2, 51)

16 - Defining karate by modern and traditional styles based upon the type of sparring employed is an ambiguous process because not all styles fit so easily within the two categories. With modern styles, particularly those which have evolved in the west to meet the criteria of sport karate, such as modern free-style karate, the process of identifying and categorizing is fairly simple. However, with others whose lineage stems from a traditional style, yet have been modified to meet the demands of sport karate, the identification process can be complicated. For instance, if a particular style of Shorin-ryu has split into two branches, one using full contact sparring, the other point sparring then the determining factor of whether the style is designed for sport or traditional venues is not the style of karate itself, but the various schools found within the Shorin-ryu style and how they train.

17 - This generic comparison also ignores the body structure and neuro-psychological traits common to particular societies. Europeans, as a whole, tend to be longer limbed than most Okinawans and Japanese. When translated to empty-handed punching this phenomenon allows the western fighter to rely on upper-body strength, whereas the Japanese or Okinawan fighter will use full body actions to generate power. Hence the reason why many styles of karate make use of lunging actions and hip rotations, or else power is generated from the feet upward, instead of from the waist to hand as is commonly found in western style boxing.

About the Author

A former paratrooper, Michael Rosenbaum was first introduced to the Asian Fighting Arts in 1966, by his father who practiced Judo while stationed on Okinawa during the 1950's. In 1976, Rosenbaum began formal training in Okinawan karate. Since that time he has also studied Burmese, Chinese, Japanese and Western styles of fighting. Rosenbaum has three previous books to his credit: *Okinawa's Complete Karate System Isshinryu* (2001): *The Fighting Arts; Their Evolution from Secret Societies to Modern Times* (2002): *Kata and the Transmission of Knowledge in Traditional Martial Arts* (2004). In addition to being a frequent contributor to Iain Abernathy's online forum, Rosenbaum has also published articles in *Hoplos*, *The International Haplology Society* newsletter, and *Fencer's Quarterly*. He lives near the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, where he spends his free time watching the various deer, wild turkey, raccoons, birds and snakes that inhabit his and his wife's farm.

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