

# The Evolution of Karate:

## From Secret Martial Art to

## Worldwide Cultural Sport

Supervisor: Professor Matsui Kantaro from  
the International Budo University, Japan

Filip Swennen

Dedicated to

Sayaka

For being my everything, because without her I would be nothing.

In Remembrance of

Jan Taverniers

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## Foreword



Patrick McCarthy

Hanshi 8th Dan

International Ryukyu Karate Research Society

([www.koryu-uchinadi.com](http://www.koryu-uchinadi.com))

Filip Swennen has been interested in foreign language, culture and the fighting arts since childhood. The son of an academic this young man learned the value of a good education early in life. Having travelled extensively, he was schooled in Belgium, Nigeria, Italy, America and Japan, and speaks six languages but is more than just multilingual. Married to a lovely Japanese girl, Sayaka, Filip received a scholarship from the Monbushou [Japanese Ministry of Education] in October of 2007 research the martial arts at the Kokusai Budo [International Martial Arts University] in Japan. Young only in years, with a wisdom that far outweighs his youthfulness, this author has an impressive resume. A PhD candidate presently residing in Japan, Filip Swennen has conducted field studies throughout the land of the rising sun, including Okinawa, and has studied several traditional fighting arts under leading experts. He is also a member of the International Ryukyu Research Society and received its, “*Historian of the Year*,” award in 2008.

Having published his Master's Thesis “The Creation of the Myth of `Traditional Japanese` Karate under the Pressure of Prewar Nationalism”, in our Journal of Fighting Arts, I am more than familiar with the research, writing and work of this scholar warrior. In fact, the work which lies before you, " The Evolution of Karate: From Secret Martial

Art to Worldwide Cultural Sport,” is not just a reflection of his academic thesis, it is an entirely fresh approach to understanding that which should be known by all who study the traditional art of karate, as it is meant to be understood. This analysis clarifies both technical and historical ambiguity by explaining its principles and evolution along with what forces affected its growth and direction. From training equipment, competition and kata to the dan/kyu system, and cultural insights, this work will help readers understand the history of what karate was in the beginning, how and why it changed, and what it has subsequently become today.

I am confident that you will enjoy the depth of this presentation as much as the simplicity with which it's presented. If ever there was a definitive work on the history, evolution and culture of karate then this is it. There is a provocative term that exists within the classical fighting arts of Japan, it's known as *Bunburyodo* [文武両道]. Tracing the origin of its wisdom back to ancient China, the term roughly means, "*The Pen and the Sword*." Literally, 'Bun' [文], means scholarly, 'bu' [武] means martial [as in arts], 'ryo' [両] means, both, and 'do' [道] means, the way/path. Collectively, the binary message places special importance upon balancing physical training with intellectual study for those who pursue true mastery of, "*The Way*." In my opinion, Filip Swennen is one such *scholar warrior*, a true bujin [武人].

The IRKRS is proudly associated with many leading researchers, historians, authors and authorities of the classical and contemporary fighting arts. I am confident that the work, which lies before you, will be widely accepted and succeed in helping this scholar establish a befitting reputation. I am honoured that he's ask me to write the foreword for his first book and confident that you will be just as pleased with it as have I. Additionally, I would encourage readers to keep an eye out for any and all future work by this author.



## Jos Robert

Ronin karate, Belgium

(roninkarate.be)

Since Filip Swennen entered my dojo more than a decade ago, it was rather clear that he was not looking for sports or even “traditional” karate, but was trying to study karate as a self-defence tool, as it was supposed to be practised in the era of the pioneers of the Ryu-kyu’s.

There is surely a huge difference between the intensions and outcomes of “old” or “koryu” karate practise and the form that start spreading across the world in the early fifties of the previous century.

The confusion about “Why it all has changed ?” pushed him to a deeper study concerning the cultural/political atmosphere in pre-war Japan. This resulted in his work “The creation of the myth of “Traditional Japanese” karate under the pressure of pre-war nationalism.” which was rewarded by the International Ryu-kyu research society under the guidance of Mr P. McCarthy. This is not only for me, but for the whole Ronin karate community a great honour.



Joe Swift

Chief Instructor

Tokyo Mushinkan

It is a distinct pleasure to write a foreword for the research of my young friend, Mr. Filip Swennen.

Although an academic-like approach to Karate research has surfaced in the last decade or so, Filip is one of the very few to research this subject in an actual academic setting. The fact that he received a scholarship from the Japanese government to research a thesis on Karate at the International Budo University should be not only testament to his talents, but I also hope that it serves as a springboard to a more formal acceptance of Karate by the academic world as a serious field of study.

I have had many conversations with Filip on Karate history over some Awamori after training, and have always been amazed by not only his enthusiasm and sharp questions, but also with the amount of knowledge he has already amassed. Of course, with mentors such as Patrick McCarthy, Hokama Tetsuhiro and Jos Robert, I would expect nothing less from him.

If this essay serves even only one practitioner of modern traditional Karate to reevaluate his or her understanding of the art and embrace a more holistic approach to training, then I feel that all of the hard work, time and effort on the part of Filip Swennen will have paid off for him. I know I will be recommending it as standard reading around the Karate world.





Hokama Shungan (Tetsuhiro)

Goju-ryu, Hanshi 10<sup>th</sup> Dan

PhD., Karate and Budo Studies

Curator, Okinawa Karate Museum

Whenever speaking about researching the cultures of Okinawa (a.k.a. Ryukyu) and Japan, the most important thing is to carry out actual fieldwork.

Mr. Filip Swennen has visited Okinawa many times for his research into Karate. He is also a serious Karate practitioner who has trained in Japan, as well. I had the pleasure of reading his previous thesis, and from his amazingly detailed research, one can come to recognize that he is an elite young man.

I want to take this opportunity to express my enthusiasm about his new paper, which covers many topics. From the outstanding contents of his thesis, I am sure that his important research work will continue. His strong points as a researcher are the thoroughness of his fieldwork as well as his physical skills in Karate.

His essay first focuses upon gaining a proper understanding of the history of Karate, and also examines competition, kata, training equipment and clothing, and even the Karate practitioner, all in an attempt to answer the question: “What is Karate?” One of the biggest achievements of this piece of research is the analysis of the changes in mentality of Karate practitioners throughout each stage of the art’s development.

I feel that we Okinawan and Japanese Karateka should read and refer to the works of foreign researchers, and recognize their energy and enthusiasm, and use this as a springboard for the further development of our art.

It is my sincere hope that this research will be read by many Karate practitioners, and that Mr. Filip Swennen continues his important research and becomes active as a young leader in his home country.

February 7, 2009

## Acknowledgements

Sincere gratitude is what I want to express on this page. This work, and my year and half at the International Budo University, only became possible with the support of many good people.

First of all, I need to thank Matsui Kantaro. He offered me this chance to conduct my research at the International Budo University. The experience of studying and training at such a place is beyond description. Being surrounded by budoka, while analyzing the history of karate, still seems to me like a reality from the movies. This could not have been realized without the financial support of the Japanese government through the Monbukagakusho scholarship. Thank you for making this dream a reality.

I want to thank several karateka from whom I learned so much.

Jos Robert of Ronin Leuven for introducing me to the world of karate and his guidance up to today. His knowledge of Japanese history, kata, applications and realistic fighting never stops amazing me. Our many intercontinental Skype sessions between Belgium and Japan gave me several ideas that I adapted for this work.

I thank Joe Swift for his feedback and for clarifying several points. He also gave me kindly the permission to use the table he made of Funakoshi's name changes to several kata. The title of this work was also hinted by him. I enjoyed very much training with him and emptying together some bottles of Awamori.

Hokama Tetsuhiro for his warm hospitality when I stayed at his house in Okinawa. I learned a lot from the many conversations we had on the history of karate. He also taught me several techniques and kata, showing me a glimpse of what karate once was. The books he publishes and his karate museum contain a treasure of information. I am proud that I received my Shodan from him.

Patrick McCarthy for publishing my previous work in his IRKRS quarterly journal and awarding me with the award of 'Historian of the Year' of 2008. His pioneering work as a karate historian is very inspiring and his encouragements mean a lot to me.

Fujioka Isao for taking me under his wing for my karate training during my

stay in Japan. I was introduced by him to the training methods of a full contact karate style called Ashihara Kaikan. His teachings on `sabaki` will be treasured for the rest of my life.

Otsuka for being a good friend and a great training buddy.

Merlijn Jocqué needs to be specially mentioned here as he took the time and effort to hammer my earlier drafts into a much better shape. His advice improved the quality of this work tremendously.

I would like to thank the following sensei of the International Budo University for instructing me in the basics of their martial art: Kaneda sensei for Iaidō, Kimura sensei for Naginata and Tatsugi sensei for Aikidō.

I want to thank my parents, Rony and Christine, for always supporting me with their love. I also want to mention my brother Johan, just because I feel like it. My grandparents: Biba & Bobonne, Omi & Opi. My parents-in-law, Michiharu and Yoko, for their love and their wonderful taste in food.

I want to thank my wife Sayaka for her love, patience, support... Let me put it this way: I worked on this thesis and trained while sayaka did everything else. She is all I can wish for, and more.

Filip Swennen

## Introduction: What this book is and isn't

This book is my attempt to answer certain questions. These questions started surfacing about more than a decade ago when I started training in karate. I commenced my training out of an interest in martial arts and a hunger to find an efficient self-defense system.

I started asking questions to others and myself about many different aspects of karate. Many of these questions seem naïve in hindsight but others still keep me up at night. Why do we train kata? What do these movements mean in the kata? Why can't I kick the leg? Why can't I grab the person and try to throw him? (I trained judo a couple of years before I started karate.) Why can't you hit the other person in competition? Why don't we use helmets that protect the nose and the mouth in free sparring? (It would prevent all the unnecessary cuts, black eyes and bloodstains on your clothing.) Why are the blue belts from that club stronger/weaker compared to the blue belts from the other club?

I wasn't satisfied by most answers given by more experienced karateka. Most answers were something in the nature of 'It is the traditional way of doing karate.' or 'Because grandmaster X said so.' The explanations had all one thing in common, they lacked a satisfying logic for me.

I took a very interesting course on the history of Okinawa when I was an exchange student for one year at the Università degli studi di Venezia in Venice, Italy. I was baffled by how much Okinawa had changed during the course of history. I finally realized that karate, originating from this small island, must have been influenced by the history of the island itself. I started working for the following two years on what eventually would become my Master's thesis for the KULeuven University: "The Creation Of The Myth Of 'Traditional Japanese' Karate Under The Pressure Of Prewar Nationalism".

I continued to train karate and followed several seminars of world known karate masters. They showed us throws, finger locks, vulnerable points of the human body,... all techniques that were unknown to most karateka. Each master had its own approach but all of them had one thing in common. They knew the history of karate.

This led me to the following question: 'What changes happened over time to karate?' I received the Monbukagakusho scholarship from the Japanese government and was given the chance by Sensei Matsui Kantaro to conduct my research at the International Budo University in Japan. This book(let) is my temporary answer to the question I formulated above. It is an overview of some of the biggest changes that have occurred to karate. This work is only an overview and far from complete. Trying to cram all the information into one book would leave the reader, and the writer, confused and lost.

I divided the book into seven chapters. The first chapter summarizes briefly the general history of Okinawa. My curiosity regarding the history of karate sprouted from the intriguing history of this island. This chapter should give the reader the necessary background to understand the historical context of karate. The second chapter analyzes the term 'karate' and where it comes from. The following one compares the two main types of karate competitions and how they came into existence. The fourth chapter analyzes the 'heart' of karate: its kata. An overview of all different types of equipment used by karateka is given in the fifth chapter. The sixth chapter uncovers the origins of the white karategi and the black belt and the final chapter unravels the evolution of the karateka himself.

This work is written to be read. You may therefore copy it as a whole and give it to anyone, as long as nothing is altered. I even encourage it. (You may contact the author at [filipswennen1@hotmail.com](mailto:filipswennen1@hotmail.com) for any inquiries.)

I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Filip Swennen  
Katsuura, Japan

## 1. Okinawa

In the first chapter we first briefly outline the history of Okinawa, the place of origin of karate. The following historical overview is definitely not complete but should be seen as background information. This background is necessary to understand several of the changes that happened to karate, which we will analyze in the following chapters.

### 1.1. Okinawa today

Okinawa (沖縄) takes a particular place in the history of karate. It is seen as karate's place of origin.<sup>1</sup> Okinawa is a small island located to the southeast of Japan's mainland. The southern position of Okinawa provides it with a subtropical climate<sup>2</sup> and it is frequently visited by typhoons. (台風) Okinawa's economy relies in a large part on tourism.<sup>3</sup> The many beaches, warm climate and clear blue sea attract many people each year. But Okinawa was not always a Japanese prefecture.

Okinawa only became officially a prefecture of Japan in 1879.<sup>4</sup> (沖縄県) It used to be an independent kingdom, namely the Ryūkyū kingdom. (琉球王国) This means that Okinawa, and therefore karate, cannot be considered 'Japanese' for more than one and a half centuries. In fact, karate was only formally introduced from Okinawa to the Japanese mainland in the 1920s.<sup>5</sup>



beach in Okinawa

### 1.2. From Ryūkyū to Okinawa: a historical overview

#### 1.2.1. Ryūkyū

Important historical changes of the Ryūkyū happen during eras of conflict, like in most cultures. From the seventh century onwards we can find

<sup>1</sup> 外間哲弘、*空手道歴史年表*、p.9.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Collcut, Marius Jansen and Isao Kumakura, *Cultural Atlas of Japan*, p.31.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Rosa Caroli, *Il Mito Dell' Omogeneità Giapponese: Storia Di Okinawa*, p.101.

<sup>5</sup> Kenji Tokitsu, *Sotria del Karate: La Via della Mano Vuota*, p.69.

castles, called `gusuku` (グスク), on the Ryūkyū islands.<sup>6</sup> There were about 300 castles at its peak.<sup>7</sup> The noblemen<sup>8</sup> ruled from their castles and fought amongst each other to expand their territories. Over time the stronger areas absorbed the smaller ones, resulting in three states by the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. These states were, from north to south: Hokuzan (北山), Chūzan (中山) and Nanzan (南山).<sup>9</sup> This period of the three territories was called the period of the `three mountains`.<sup>10</sup> Each of these three territories wanted to strengthen their power by being acknowledged by China<sup>11</sup>. The king of Chūzan<sup>12</sup> was the first to create such a vassal relationship in 1372. The Not much later, a group of Chinese immigrants settled themselves in the village of Kume<sup>13</sup> in 1392.<sup>14</sup> This relationship with China strongly influenced the Ryūkyū society.<sup>15</sup>



Ryūkyū map of the `three mountains`

Chūzan<sup>16</sup> conquered the other territories and unified them in 1429 forming the Ryūkyū kingdom.<sup>17</sup> (琉球王国) Private ownership of weapons was abolished in the new kingdom under the later king Shō Shin<sup>18</sup> (尚真), in order to weaken any possible opposition.

Satsuma (薩摩), a southern province of Japan, invaded the Ryūkyū kingdom in 1609.<sup>19</sup> The invaders also forced a weapons ban after the conquest upon the small kingdom.<sup>20</sup> Japan closed its

<sup>6</sup> 野原耕栄、沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変容、p.24.

<sup>7</sup> 野原耕栄、沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変容、p.15.

<sup>8</sup> Anji or Aji (按可)

<sup>9</sup> George H. Kerr, *Okinawa: The History of an Island People*, p.60-62.

<sup>10</sup> Period of the three mountains, Sanzanjidai. (三山時代)

<sup>11</sup> Chinese Ming dynasty (中国明)

<sup>12</sup> King Satto (察度)

<sup>13</sup> Kume-son (久米村)

<sup>14</sup> Rosa Caroli, *Il Mito Dell' Omogeneità Giapponese: Storia Di Okinawa*, p.43.

<sup>15</sup> 外間哲弘、空手道歴史年表、p.16.

<sup>16</sup> The unification was done by Sho Hashi (尚色志)

<sup>17</sup> 外間哲弘、空手道歴史年表、p.16.

<sup>18</sup> 野原耕栄、沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変容、p.43.

<sup>19</sup> George H. Kerr, *Okinawa: The History of an Island People*, p.158.

<sup>20</sup> 外間哲弘、金城政和、沖縄の古武道具・鍛錬道具 p.53.



borders from the outside world as it was afraid to be colonized by the West. All of Japan was forbidden to trade internationally, and this created a unique relationship between Satsuma and the Ryūkyū. Satsuma wanted to show the rest of Japan that they have conquered a different country. At the same time they wanted to profit from the good trading connections of the Ryūkyū, mainly with China. Satsuma lifted taxes while it avoided changing the local culture so that the trade in the Ryūkyū could continue as usual.<sup>21</sup>

The Ryūkyū kingdom was thus forced in a `dual subordination`, as it had to pay tribute to both China and Japan.<sup>22</sup> The Japanese Satsuma clan tried to hide their presence every time the Chinese came so they could keep profiting from the indirect trade with China through the Ryūkyū. Although it was still a kingdom, it had lost its freedom to an outside power and would never regain it again.



Okinawa and its surroundings

### 1.2.2. Okinawa: The `Japanization` of the Ryūkyū

In 1868, Japan's Meiji era began. This was a period of change during which Japan rapidly evolved into a modern nation. The age of the samurai was over and Japan would become a state with many similarities to the European countries. One of the main issues was defining the borders of the

<sup>21</sup> Rosa Caroli, *Il Mito Dell' Omogeneità Giapponese: Storia Di Okinawa*, p.49.

<sup>22</sup> George H. Kerr, *Okinawa: The History of an Island People*, p.166.

`Land of the Rising Sun`. The Ryūkyū kingdom was forced to become part of Japan as a feudal state<sup>23</sup> in 1872, officially ending the kingdom.<sup>24</sup> It eventually became the prefecture of Okinawa<sup>25</sup> in 1879.<sup>26</sup> So it is only from the 1870s that Okinawa became an official part from Japan.

Japan wanted a unified, modern and strong country so it could compete with the West. This meant for Okinawa that it had to abandon its traditional language and culture. The Japanese government introduced a new educational system, the national anthem and flag, Japanese as the official language and compulsory conscription. These were all tools to turn the Okinawan people into Japanese subjects.<sup>27</sup>

Japan's nationalism continued rising, which led to several wars, peaking in the Second World War. This extreme nationalism from the end of the 1920s onwards tried to eliminate all traditional Okinawan customs and habits.<sup>28</sup> Japan eventually lost the Second World War in 1945 and became occupied by the United States<sup>29</sup> until 1952.<sup>30</sup> Okinawa stayed officially under the control of the United States until the administrative rights were returned to Japan in 1972.<sup>31</sup> Yet, the military forces of the United States still have not left their bases in Okinawa, even in the present day.

### 1.3. Conclusion

The Ryūkyū kingdom became a Japanese province called Okinawa less than two centuries ago. The change in government had a large impact on the customs, habits and cultural aspects of the former kingdom. Karate is an

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<sup>23</sup> A Japanese feudal state is called a Han. So the Ryūkyū kingdom became the Ryūkyū Han. (琉球藩)

<sup>24</sup> Rosa Caroli, *Il Mito Dell' Omogeneità Giapponese: Storia Di Okinawa*, p.101.  
The Ryūkyū Shobun (琉球処分) is the term for the actions that the Japanese Meiji government took to turn the Ryūkyū kingdom into the Okinawan province between 1872 en 1879.

<sup>25</sup> A Japanese modern province is called a Ken. So the Okinawan province is Okinawa Ken. (沖縄県)

<sup>26</sup> Rosa Caroli, *Il Mito Dell' Omogeneità Giapponese: Storia Di Okinawa*, p.13.

<sup>27</sup> Filip Swennen, *The Creation Of The Myth Of 'Traditional Japanese' Karate Under The Perssure Of Prewar Nationalism*, p.54.

<sup>28</sup> Rosa Caroli, *Il Mito Dell' Omogeneità Giapponese: Storia Di Okinawa*, p.15.

<sup>29</sup> General Douglas A. MacArthur as leader of SCAP (Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers)

<sup>30</sup> Martin Collcut, Marius Jansen and Isao Kumakura, *Cultural Atlas of Japan*, p.206.

<sup>31</sup> Rosa Caroli, *Il Mito Dell' Omogeneità Giapponese: Storia Di Okinawa*, p.245.

example of an Okinawan cultural phenomenon that had to adapt itself in many ways, first to Japan and later to the world.

## 2. The name: `karate`

### 2.1. Karatedō (空手道)

Karatedō, also simply called karate, is now popular throughout the entire world.<sup>32</sup> It is generally known that the term karate signifies `empty hand`. In Japanese there are two characters<sup>33</sup> used to write `karate`. The first character 空, signifies `empty`. The second kanji 手 means `hand` or `skill`.

In case of `karatedō` a third character is used: 道 literally meaning `way`. This third character refers to the mental, spiritual aspect of the martial art.<sup>34</sup> Karatedō thus could be translated as `The way of the empty hand`. But the term `karatedō` and its meaning of `the way of the empty hand` are in fact terms that only have been in common use since the twentieth century. So what was it called before and why did they change the name?

### 2.2. From `Ti` to `karatedō`

#### 2.2.1. In the beginning there was `Ti`

Many castles were built in the Ryūkyū from the seventh century. These castles were the central ruling point of the local noblemen. Many battles were fought amongst them to expand their territories.<sup>35</sup> Swords, spears, bows and arrows were used in battle. But the swords were few, thin and small because there was almost no iron available.<sup>36</sup> The lack of iron resulted that most weapons were primitive and weren't the most effective tools for killing compared to weapons of other cultures. These weapons often broke or slipped from ones hands. They therefore are believed to have

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<sup>32</sup> 外間哲弘、空手道歴史年表、p.III.

<sup>33</sup> Kanji (漢字)

<sup>34</sup> Patrick McCarthy, *Ancient Okinawan Martial Arts: Koryu Uchinadi*, p.61.

<sup>35</sup> 野原耕栄、沖縄伝統空手「手」(Ti)の変容、p.10.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p.26.

Nohara Kouei refers to a document called the Zuisho (随書) which is a historical record made in the seventh century of China's Sui Dynasty. It is this document that mentions the use of primitive weapons in these battles. This document would be the first written reference to the Ryukyu according to Hokama Tetsuhiro. (外間哲弘、空手道歴史年表、p.10.)

trained in weaponless combat to be still able to fight in case such a scenario would happen.<sup>37</sup> This weaponless art is generally referred to as `Ti` or `Tui` written by the character 手, meaning `hand`. The weapons training that was developed together with `Ti` is known in modern times as `kobudō` (古武道).<sup>38</sup> This analogy of training weaponless martial arts next to weapons training is very similar to how Japanese jiyūjutsu (柔術) was developed.

### 2.2.2. `Tōdi`: under the influence of China

The many castles fought amongst each other, which resulted in the weaker ones being absorbed by the stronger territories. This led to the period of the three mountains (三山時代: 北山、中山、南山) in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>39</sup> So `Ti` had from the 7<sup>th</sup> century onwards the time to develop itself for use on the battlefields.<sup>40</sup>

In the three mountain period, a vassal relationship with China resulted in influences of Chinese martial arts on `Ti`.<sup>41</sup> In 1392, 36 Chinese families made the trip to the Ryūkyū and would live from then on in a village called Kume-son.<sup>42</sup> These and several other anecdotes exist of Chinese who imported their martial arts into the Ryūkyū.<sup>43</sup> It is probably at this time that the Chinese martial arts, mostly from the Fujian province, started to influence the local `Ti`.

The three kingdoms were finally united under Chuzan (中山) to form the Ryūkyū kingdom in 1429.<sup>44</sup> The relationship with China flourished under the Ryūkyū kingdom. How much the Chinese in the Ryūkyū taught their martial art to non-Chinese is not clear.

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<sup>37</sup> 野原耕栄、沖縄伝統空手「手」(Ti-y)の変容、p.34.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p.35.

<sup>39</sup> Rosa Caroli, *Il Mito Dell' Omogeneità Giapponese: Storia Di Okinawa*, p. 42.

<sup>40</sup> 野原耕栄、沖縄伝統空手「手」(Ti-y)の変容、p.46.

<sup>41</sup> 外間哲弘、空手道歴史年表、p.16.

<sup>42</sup> The Chinese came probably most from the Chinese Fujian province, according to Rosa Caroli. (*Il Mito Dell' Omogeneità Giapponese: Storia Di Okinawa*, p. 43.) The author would like to mention that Okinawan karate does have similarities with martial arts found in this province.

<sup>43</sup> To name a few according to Hokama Tetsuhiro, *Timeline of Karate History: Pre-History to 2000*, p.13. Ufugusuku Kenyu from Xia family/ p.14. Zheng Jiu/ p.17. Sappushi Chen Kan and his entourage

<sup>44</sup> 外間哲弘、空手道歴史年表、p.16.

But the real change came when inhabitants of Ryūkyū themselves started to go to China.<sup>45</sup> They would learn martial arts during their trip abroad, amongst other skills, and bring back that knowledge to the Ryūkyū. There the Chinese arts would blend with `Ti`.

It is said that `Tōdi` (唐手) was first heard in the 19<sup>th</sup> century after that Sakugawa Kanga (佐久川寛賀) came back from his trips to China.<sup>46</sup> He went to Beijing (北京) five times and brought back a martial style that was different than those from the Chinese Fujian province that already had been introduced by the Chinese immigrants.<sup>47</sup>

The Chinese influences blended with the already existing `Ti`. The name `Tōdi` was given to this new mix to make a contrast with the pure form of `Ti`. The `tō` character 唐, that was added to the already existing `hand` 手 character, referred to China's Tang dynasty or China itself.<sup>48</sup> Although `Tōdi` became used since Sakugawa Kanga (佐久川寛賀), both terms were commonly used interchangeably according to Hanashiro Chōmo (花城長茂) and Miyagi Chōjun (宮城長順).<sup>49</sup>



Hanashiro Chōmo



Miyagi Chōjun

<sup>45</sup> A few examples of those who travelled to China and learned martial arts according to 外間哲弘、*沖縄空手列伝百人*, p.14. Sakugawa Kanga (佐久川寛賀), p.27. Higaonna Kanryo (東恩納寛量), p.32. Kinjo Matsu (金地松), etc.

<sup>46</sup> 野原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変容*, p.48.

<sup>47</sup> 外間哲弘、*沖縄空手列伝百人*, p.14.

<sup>48</sup> Patrick McCarthy, *The Bible of Karate: Bubushi*, p.56.

<sup>49</sup> Patrick McCarthy, *Ancient Okinawan Martial Arts: Koryu Uchinadi*, p.60-61.

### 2.2.3. `Karate`: under the influence of Japan

We need to look now at the Japanese language itself before we continue on the issue of how the name `Tōdi` was changed into `Karate`. As we have mentioned before, `Tōdi` is written by two characters `China/Tang` 唐 and `hand` 手.

Most Japanese characters have several different pronunciations.<sup>50</sup> For example: the `China/Tang` 唐 kanji can be read as `tō` and also as `kara`. The `empty/sky` kanji 空 can be read as `kuu`, `a`, `sora` and `kara`. So for the pronunciation `kara` in `karate` you could choose either of the kanji but the meaning would change from `China hand` (唐手) to `empty hand` (空手).<sup>51</sup> Why did this change happen?

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Ryūkyū kingdom was abolished and changed into the Okinawa prefecture of Japan in 1879.<sup>52</sup> The old kingdom had build close links with China over the many centuries. This relationship had been tolerated by Japan because its Satsuma province could make profits from the trade between the Ryūkyū kingdom and China. But since the kingdom now became a province of Japan, all its ties with China had to be severed. Everything typical Chinese would not be tolerated in the Japanese culture<sup>53</sup>, especially after the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95.<sup>54</sup> It seems rather logical that if the local Okinawan, martial art wanted to survive, it needed to change the first character since at that time `Tōdi` was written as `China hand` 唐手

The first document that referred to the martial art as `empty hand` in Okinawa was Hanashiro Chōmo's (花城長茂) *Karate Kumite*<sup>55</sup> in 1905.<sup>56</sup>

But it would take another 25 years before the `empty hand` term would show up in mainland Japan and generally accepted in Okinawa.

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<sup>50</sup> Chinese readings of a kanji (漢字) are called `onyomi` (音読み) and Japanese readings are called `kunyomi` (訓読み)

<sup>51</sup> The difference in the pronunciation of 手 in `Toudi` (唐手) and karate (空手) can be found in the difference of pronunciation in the Okinawan dialect and Japanese. The meaning stays `hand` in both pronunciations.

<sup>52</sup> George H. Kerr, *Okinawa: The History of an Island People*, p.397.

<sup>53</sup> Patrick McCarthy, *The Bible of Karate: Bubushi*, p.54.

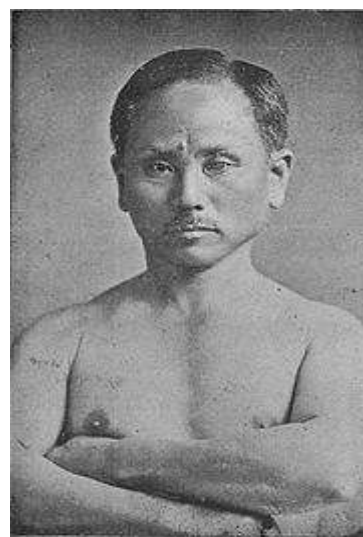
<sup>54</sup> Martin Collcut, Marius Jansen and Isao Kumakura, *Cultural Atlas of Japan*, p.190.

<sup>55</sup> 外間哲弘、*沖縄空手列伝百人*, p.35.

<sup>56</sup> Patrick McCarthy, *Ancient Okinawan Martial Arts: Koryu Uchinadi*, p.62.

Karate became a part of the Okinawa physical education at school in 1905, due the efforts and the changes made by mostly Itosu Ankō (糸洲安恒).<sup>57</sup> To minimize confusion for school students, `Tōdi` was pronounced as `karate`<sup>58</sup>, as the `Ti` and `Tōdi` pronunciations respectively refer to `hand` and `China hand`. The term `Tōdi` and `Ti` were used interchangeable for the Okinawan martial art until around 1905. In that year, Itosu began a physical education program based on a modified form of Ti at the Prefectural First Middle School (沖縄県立第一中学校) and the Prefectural Teacher's College (沖縄県立師範学校). Later, in 1908, Itosu Ankō (糸洲安恒) wrote his `10 articles of karate` (唐手十ヶ条) for the Okinawa Prefecture Board of Education. The title was written using the Tang/China 唐 kanji. From then on, the term `Ti` was hardly used anymore.<sup>59</sup> The now more commonly accepted term was `Karate` 唐手, which could also be read as `Tōdi`. The final step of the name change would be done at the Japanese mainland.

Funakoshi Gichin (富名腰義珍 or 船越義珍), an Okinawan karate expert, started teaching karate at Japanese universities in the 1920's. The Japanese students disliked the idea that they would be learning a Chinese martial art. The Keiou University (慶應義塾大学) karate research group (大学唐手研究会) published a magazine (titled `fist` 拳) in 1930 where a student proposed the new `empty` kanji (空), inspired by Buddhist poetry. But they already referred to karate with the new kanji in 1929, and would be the first to do so on the Japanese mainland.<sup>60</sup> Funakoshi Gichin (富名腰義珍 or 船越義珍) himself adopted the new way of writing `karate` in 1935 with his book *Karatedō Kyōhan* (空手道教範). From then on, the `empty hand` term 空手 became more and more in use, especially in the nationalistic thirties.<sup>61</sup>



Funakoshi Gichin

<sup>57</sup> Kenji Tokitsu, *Storia del Karate: La Via della Mano Vuota*, p.57.

<sup>58</sup> 外間哲弘、*空手道歴史年表*, p.33.

<sup>59</sup> 野原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変容*, p.72.

<sup>60</sup> 野原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変容*, p.106-108.

<sup>61</sup> Kenji Tokitsu, *Storia del Karate: La Via della Mano Vuota*, p.10.



The Dai Nippon Butoku Kai (大日本武徳会), the largest organization for Japanese budō, recognized `Karate` as a Japanese martial art in 1933.<sup>62</sup> In 1937 they officially changed `Karate` (唐手) into `Karatedo` (空手道).<sup>63</sup> Hence, the writing of `karate` would from then on be `The Way of the Empty Hand.` After the meeting of the Okinawan karate masters in 1936,<sup>64</sup> the new way of writing also became commonly used in Okinawa, as well.<sup>65</sup> The reason why they added the `way/road` 道 kanji was in analogy of the other martial arts recognized by the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai (大日本武徳会). Jyūjutsu (柔術) had been changed to jūdō (柔道) and kenjutsu (剣術) to kendō (剣道). In the same way the once brutal art of `Tōdi`, also sometimes referred to as `Tōdijutsu`, was changed to `Karatedō`. With the `dō` 道 kanji they wanted to stress the idea that the art was a way to develop oneself, and not a pure physical form of training for combat or self-defense.<sup>66</sup>

### 2.3. Conclusion

The world today knows `karatedō` 空手道 as `The Way of the Empty Hand`. But this term only exists officially since the 1930s and is a result from a political situation. The first time `karate` can be found in the characters of `empty hand` 空手 was in 1905. Although the history of the martial art is much older, the name `karate` as we know it today is just a bit over a century old. It has changed from `Ti` 手 to `Tōdi` 唐手 to `Karate` 空手 and `Karatedō` 空手道.

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<sup>62</sup> 外間哲弘、空手道歴史年表、p.42.

<sup>63</sup> 野原耕栄、沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変容、p.108.

<sup>64</sup> Patrick McCarthy, *Ancient Okinawan Martial Arts: Koryu Uchinadi*, p.57-69.

<sup>65</sup> 外間哲弘、空手道歴史年表、p.43.

<sup>66</sup> Patrick McCarthy, *The Bible of Karate: Bubishi*, p.56.

### 3. Competition

There are many different types of competitions. The reason for all the variations can be explained as follows: The closer a competition format is to a real fight, the more dangerous it becomes. The safer the competition is, the further it distances itself from actual combat. There is always a trade-off between safety and realism.

#### 3.1. Today's competition format

In karate there are two types of competition: kumite (組手) or combative competition with a partner and “kata”. The aim of this chapter is to give an overview of the most common types of combative karate competition and their general characteristics. Kata competition will be touched upon in the following chapter.

Modern karate competitions can be divided into two categories based on the level of contact that is allowed. The first category is generally referred to as ‘no contact’, ‘light contact’ or ‘point sparring’ competitions. The second type is generally called ‘full contact’ or ‘knock down’ karate. In both categories is the objective of a match to score points by executing a technique within the competition zone in a certain time frame. The major differences between the two types are the criteria for when a point is given.

##### 3.1.1. ‘Light contact’ competition

The ‘light contact’ or ‘sundome’ (寸止め) competition is the most wide spread format of competition karate. The current organization that leads the world championships and is recognized by the Olympic committee is the World Karate Federation, a.k.a. the WKF. Most ‘light contact’ or ‘point competitions’ have rules that are very similar to the WKF rules. We will therefore take a closer look at the official rules of the WKF<sup>67</sup> from



**Light contact competition**

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<sup>67</sup> WKF official rules can be found at [http://www.karateworld.org/images/stories/Downloads/wkf\\_competition\\_rules\\_english\\_](http://www.karateworld.org/images/stories/Downloads/wkf_competition_rules_english_)

the standpoint of a competitor fighter.

The match itself lasts three minutes for the category `Senior Males`, and two minutes for `Women, Junior and Cadets`.<sup>68</sup> In the case of a draw, there will be an extension of one minute. The first one who scores in the extension period is declared the winner.<sup>69</sup>

WKF mitts, shin pads, foot protection as well as a mouth protector and a WKF chest protector for females are compulsory. The mitts, shin pads and foot protection come in red and blue. The competitor, who will be referred to as `aka` (赤), will be wearing the red equipment and the other competitor, referred to as `ao` (青) will be wearing the blue protective gear. A groin guard is not mandatory.<sup>70</sup>

### 3.1.1.1. Scoring system

Scores are given as sanbon (三本), nihon (二本) or ippon (一本). Sanbon or three points are given for kicks to the head, face or neck and throws or sweeps followed by a technique. Nihon or two points are given for unbalancing the opponent and scoring, kicks to the body, punches to the back of the torso or the back of the head and for a combination of hand techniques. Ippon or one point is given for a punch to the head or body. The legal targets are limited to the head, face, neck, abdomen, chest, back and side.<sup>71</sup> A critique that often is given on this competition format is the vagueness of criteria and the difficulty for bystanders to understand the judging system based on these criteria. To quote<sup>72</sup>

*A score is awarded when a technique is performed to the following criteria to a scoring area:*

- a) Good form*
- b) Sporting attitude*
- c) Vigorous application*
- d) Awareness (ZANSHIN)*

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<sup>68</sup> WKF official rules p.8.

<sup>69</sup> WKF official rules p.11.

<sup>70</sup> WKF official rules p.5.

<sup>71</sup> WKF official rules p.8-9.

<sup>72</sup> WKF official rules p.8.

- e) *Good timing*
- f) *Correct distance*

These criteria are further elaborated on in the rules but keep a distinctive area of vagueness. A few examples:

*III. A technique with “**Good Form**” is said to have characteristics conferring probable effectiveness within the framework of traditional Karate concepts.”<sup>73</sup>*

or

*IX. **Distancing** also relates to the point at which the completed technique comes to rest or near the target. A punch or kick that comes somewhere between skin touch and 2-5 centimeters from the face, may be said to have the correct distance. However, Jodan (head) punches, which come within a reasonable distance of the target and which the opponent makes no attempt to block or avoid will be scored, provided the technique meets the other criteria.*<sup>74</sup>

The most confusing rule when witnessing bouts will be that of a category one offence, first point:

- 1. Techniques which make excessive contact, having regard to the scoring area attacked, and techniques which make contact with the throat.*<sup>75</sup>

Which is further elaborated on:

### ***FACE CONTACT – SENIORS AND JUNIORS***

*II. For Senior and Junior competitors, non-injurious, light, controlled “touch” contact to the face, head and neck is allowed (but not to the throat). Where contact is deemed by the referee to be too strong but does not diminish the competitor’s chance of winning, a warning (CHUKOKU) may be given. A second contact under the*

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<sup>73</sup> WKF official rules p.10.

<sup>74</sup> WKF official rules p.10-11.

<sup>75</sup> WKF official rules p.12.

*same circumstances will be penalized by KIEKOKU and IPPON (one point) given to the opponent. A third offence will be given HANSOKU CHUI and NIHON (two points), to the injured competitor. A further offence will result in disqualification by HANSOKU.*

This rule has led to a lot of confusion, as there are no objective criteria for 'too strong'. This notion of 'too strong' depends from country to country and referee to referee. What makes it even more difficult to judge is that this criteria refers to actual legal techniques to legal areas. For example, a kick to the head may be three points or may be 'too strong', resulting in a penalty. It is the author's opinion that this rule is one of the reasons that has limited the success of karate competition from the spectators point of view and therefore may be a reason for karate not having been accepted as an Olympic sport yet.

### 3.1.2. 'Full contact' competition

'Full contact' or 'knock down' karate refers to Kyokushin karate (極真) and its offshoots. We will therefore take a closer look to the rules of Kyokushin competition.<sup>76 77 78</sup>

The criteria for receiving points are different between the 'sundome' rules and the 'full contact' rules. In 'sundome' the main criteria is the 'form' of a technique. The technique has to look in a certain way for a point to be given.<sup>79</sup> For example: a head kick has the value of three points. For 'full contact' rules the criteria is mainly the 'effect' of a technique. The legal technique has to result in the fighter being 'knocked down', or losing the



Kyokushin competition

<sup>76</sup> <http://www.kyokushin.co.uk/full.htm> from Kyokushin Karate Great Britain

<sup>77</sup>

<http://www.ibk.nl/images/stories/World-championships-Kyokushin/rules-IBK-2007.pdf>

<sup>78</sup> International Budokai Kan rules can be found at

<http://www.ibk.nl/images/stories/ibk-amateur-kumite-rules/the-official-ibk-amateur-kumite-rules.pdf>

<sup>79</sup> Kenji Tokitsu, *Storia del Karate: La Via della Mano Vuota*, p.85.

will or ability to fight, for instance due to pain or the air being knocked out of his/her lungs.

### 3.1.2.1. Scoring system

The legal targets are: head, face, neck (kicks only), torso (excluding the spine), abdomen, side of the body, legs (except knee joint) a no-contact head punch after a sweep.<sup>80</sup> This is similar to light contact karate except no punches to the face are allowed, but attacks to the leg are. Protective gear is limited to a mouthpiece and a groin protector. Females must wear breastprotectors.<sup>81</sup>

To give some example from the rules.

#### ***IPPON-GACHI (full point victory)***

***The following cases will be judged as IPPON-GACHI (full point victory).***

- a) *A thrust (TSUKI), kick (KERI), and elbow strike (HIJI UCHI) or any other technique, excluding actions listed as fouls, which vigorously downs the opponent for more than five(5) seconds.*
- b) *If the opponent has lost his will to fight for more than three seconds.*<sup>82</sup>

Or

#### ***WAZA-ARI (half-point)***

***The following cases will be judged as WAZA-ARI (half point).***

- a) *When a thrust(TSUKI), kick (KERI), elbow strike( HIJI UCHI), excluding actions listed as fouls, downs the opponent for less than three seconds, and he stands up and resumes the fight.*
- b) *If the opponent has lost his will to fight but resumes the fight within three seconds.*<sup>83</sup>

The main critique given to this competition format is the lack of head punches while standing. Combatants generally drop their guard to protect against body punches. In a real fight, the most common attack is a punch to

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<sup>80</sup> International Budokai Kan rules p.14-15.

<sup>81</sup> International Budokai Kan rules p.10.

<sup>82</sup> International Budokai Kan rules p.15.

<sup>83</sup> International Budokai Kan rules p.15.

the face. Training solely focused on this type of competitive combat leaves the fighter vulnerable to face punches.<sup>84</sup> Another critique is that the fighting distance becomes very close due the lack of head punches.

### **3.2. From no competitions to world championships**

#### **3.2.1. Okinawa`s kakedameshi**

There were no official competitions before the introduction of karate to Japan. In Japan there was an interest to conduct karate in a competitive format in a similar way as jūdō and kendō competitions. This was because karate was introduced from Okinawa to Japanese university students. These young men preferred to challenge each other instead of just training kata and basics. The transformation of karate from a martial art to a sport was made by these university students on the Japanese mainland.<sup>85</sup> The Okinawans continued training karate as a martial art. Okinawa was occupied by the United States of America after the Second World War until 1972.<sup>86</sup> The Okinawan people could only travel freely to the Japanese mainland after this date. The Okinawans in general were only exposed to the idea of organizing competitions in a sparring format in 1973.<sup>87</sup>

But Okinawans did test their combative skills before these competitions in Japan were developed. They could participate on individual basis in a `real fight match` (実戦組手) or `kakedameshi` (掛け試し). The term `kakedameshi` translates roughly to a `challenge match`. Only the more advanced students in the dōjō could participate in a `kakedameshi`. The aim of the matches was to find their own weakness so they could improve their art. The better fighter paced himself to the other person`s level and neither of the fighters tried to deliberately injury the other one. Attacks to the face or groin were not allowed. It was most of the time prohibited to participate in `kakedameshi` with people who did not belong to the dōjō due the risks of injuries.<sup>88</sup> But many karateka tested their skills outside the dōjō. Motobu Chōki (本部朝基) would be the most infamous one for testing

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<sup>84</sup> Kenji Tokitsu, *Storia del Karate: La Via della Mano Vuota*, p.188.

<sup>85</sup> 野原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変*, p.261.

<sup>86</sup> Rosa Caroli, *Il Mito Dell` Omogeneità Giapponese: Storia Di Okinawa*, p.13.

<sup>87</sup> 野原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変*, p.274.

<sup>88</sup> 野原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変*, p.280.

his techniques in real life encounters in the nightlife scene of Naha, the capital of Okinawa.<sup>89</sup>

### 3.2.2. The development of `sport` karate

The idea of creating a competition format was inspired by the already existing and popular competitions for jūdō and kendō. The first steps towards a competitive format were taken in the 1930s. Traditionalists, like Funakoshi Gichin (富名腰義珍 or 船越義珍), strongly opposed the sportification of what they considered a deadly martial art. But Miki Jizaburou (三木二三郎) ignored Funakoshi's opinion and developed a competitive format using protective equipment at the Tōdai university karate club. Other clubs followed and a shift came from traditional karate to sparring with equipment. It became a sport that anybody could participate in.<sup>90</sup>

In 1930 the first competition with protective equipment was organized by the Tōkyō University Karate Research Group (東京帝大唐手研究会). They wore a helmet, body armor, groin protector, shin protectors and wrist protectors. The targets were the helmet, the solar plexus/stomach and the groin. The allowed attacks were punches and kicks. The fist was used for attacks to the face, solar plexus and groin. Kicks to almost everywhere, including the groin, were allowed. The first to reach three points would be declared the winner. The obvious differences between this competition and the present `light contact` format are that attacks to the groin are allowed and the attacks are done with full power.<sup>91</sup> This competition format would bring big changes to karate, as training from then on would focus more and more on preparation for competitions. Before this competition, karate practice was mainly kata based and was a martial art for self development.<sup>92</sup> The competition was created with the idea that karateka could engage in sparring that resembled a real fight as close as possible. Therefore attacks were allowed to the face, solar plexus and the groin. The competition format was dangerous with groin attacks and the fists being hurt on the

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<sup>89</sup> Shoshin Nagamine, *I Grandi Maestri Di Okinawa*, p.110-111.

<sup>90</sup> 原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変*, p.265.

<sup>91</sup> 原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変*, p.268.

<sup>92</sup> 原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変*, p.269.



helmets. Therefore more and more universities drifted away to a safer competition version.<sup>93</sup>

### 3.2.2.1. The birth of `sundome` or `point karate`

In 1950, five years after the Second World War, the `All Japan Student Karatedō Federation` (全日本学生空手道連盟) was created. This was about 20 years after the first competition organized by Miki Jizaburou (三木二三郎). The Waseda University (早稲田大学) came up with a new set of rules in 1952. The same year a competition using these rules was held between the Keiō University (慶応大学) and the Waseda University (早稲田大学) judged by the Takushoku University (拓殖大学). The Takushoku University (拓殖大学) revised the rules in 1955 and a competition was held at the Meiji University (明治大学) between the Takushoku University (拓殖大学), the Meiji University (明治大学) and the Keiō University (慶応大学). All three universities were satisfied with the new regulations. The following year, the new competition format became accepted by the governing student bodies. Competitions became suddenly wide spread in Japan at all major universities, as a result of the improved safety.

The first national competition for students (第1回全日本大学生空手道選手権大会) was held on the 30<sup>th</sup> November of 1957. In total 29 universities participated.<sup>94</sup> This was a great success for the new and safer rule system. The Japanese government of education would start to sponsor karate for the first time as a “sport”<sup>95</sup> and therefore acknowledge karate’s transition from a martial art to a sport. In 1964 the All Japanese Karate Federation (全日本空手道連盟) was established confirming karate’s status as a sport with the sundome rules.

The match of 1957 is seen as the starting point of sundome competition. The Okinawans only saw this format of competition for the first time in 1973 as they were occupied by the United States until then. The new sundome competitions differed substantially from the old `kakedameshi`.<sup>96</sup> The karateka were not allowed to really hit each other anymore and the referees

<sup>93</sup> 原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変*, p.270.

<sup>94</sup> 原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変*, p.272-273.

<sup>95</sup> 原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変*, p.274.

<sup>96</sup> 原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変*, p.274.

decided who wins, often in a confusing matter. The Okinawans initially resisted and criticized the new competition format strongly, but succumbed after a while and applied the new rules.

Karate spread around the world with this new and safer competition format. In 1966 the first European Championship was held in Paris. In 1970 the first World Championship was held in Tokyo, Japan.<sup>97</sup>

### 3.2.2.2. Back to the roots: 'full contact'

Although 'point sparring' became a success, not everybody was satisfied. A karate man, named Ōyama Masutatsu (大山倍達), was one of those people who criticized what sport karate had become. No actual hits were allowed. Points were awarded on a subjective basis by the referee and not its objective effectiveness. Attacks to the legs were forbidden. Ōyama was inspired by the stories told about 'kakedameshi' by his karate teacher, Gichin Funakoshi.<sup>98</sup> The aim used to be to find the one blow that could finish a fight (一撃必殺) and not gathering as much points as possible without touching each other. He therefore wanted to make rules that allowed full power blows, without the protective equipment. Full contact blows were allowed except for attacks to the groin and head punches.

The first competition with these full contact or 'Kyokushin' (極真) rules was held in Hawaii in 1959. This was thirty years after the first steps were taken to develop the sundome rules. Another competition was held in 1963 in America. And finally, in 1969, the 'First All Japan Open Karate Tournament' (第一回オーパントーナメント全日本空手選手権大会) took place in Tokyo in 1969.<sup>99</sup> It became very popular, also for the spectators, as the objective is to knock the other person out. But over time there weren't as many knockouts during the competitions, as the athletes became better trained and conditioned.

From the Kyokushin format several different styles of karate developed.<sup>100</sup> A

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[http://www.karateworld.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=47&Itemid=32](http://www.karateworld.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=47&Itemid=32)

<sup>98</sup> 原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変*, p.275.

<sup>99</sup> 原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変*, p.276.

<sup>100</sup> Examples: Ashihara karate (芦原空手), Seidōkaikan (正道会館), Enshin karate (円心空手), Seidō juku (誠道塾), Shidōkan (士道館)

new style, Seidōkan Kaikan Karate (正道会館空手), was created by a former Kyokushin practitioner named Ishii Kazuyoshi (石井和義). He developed a competition style called K-1 in 1993, which allows the top fighters in stand up fighting arts to compete under kickboxing rules. K-1 has been an enormous success, is broadcasted on TV and has promoted stand up martial arts to professional athletes. K-1 athletes get paid now in a similar way as athletes from other sports like soccer and football.

### **3.3. Conclusion**

Initially there was no competition in karate. Karateka in Okinawa would refine their fighting skills in `kakedameshi`. The idea to compete in karate was developed by Japanese university students. Karate did not have its first competition until 1930. The first competitions were done by using heavy equipment and attacking full power. As there were too many injuries a new set of rules was developed. Points would be given for attacks that would be stopped very close to the targets so that you would not actually hit the opponent. This type of competition format became very popular. A reaction came as some wanted back a more realistic approach where you could actually hit the opponent with full power. The `full contact` or `Kyokushin` rules were then developed where actual impact was allowed except for head punches and groin attacks. Many variations exist today of these competitions and we just analyzed briefly the major two groups. The reason why there are so many differences is that there is always a trade-off between realism and safety. The closer it is to actual combat, the less safe the competition is. The safer the competition is, the further it distances itself from a real fight.

## 4. Kata (型 or 形)

### 4.1. Definition

A kata can be described as a sequence of techniques performed in a set order against an imaginary opponent. Almost all karate styles have kata in their training routine. Each style has their own kata of which some are very similar to that of other styles while other kata are completely different. The Shitōryū (糸東流) style alone has more than forty kata.<sup>101</sup>

A translation of a definition of kata:

*De kata of karate contains the fundamental techniques of karate. It consists out of punching, kicking and blocking techniques that were devised through real combat. It stylized the killing techniques that were meant to fulfill the objective of karate: 'one hit, certain kill'. It was made to train in a short time frame efficiently the killing techniques.*<sup>102</sup>

### 4.2. Kata competition

In a competition<sup>103</sup>, two karateka perform their kata after each other. The first performer will be wearing a red belt ('aka' 赤) and the second karateka a blue belt ('ao' 青). The judges make a decision on who has performed their kata the best and declare 'aka' or 'ao' the winner after each has performed their kata respectively.<sup>104</sup> The winner will go to the next round. This system will continue until a winner is decided in the finals.

There are many criteria for the decision. Important elements are timing, rhythm, speed, balance, breathing technique, stances, hip movements,...<sup>105</sup> There are two criteria that are in the rules but can't be factually verified in

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<sup>101</sup>

[http://www.karateworld.org/images/stories/Downloads/wkf\\_competition\\_rules\\_english\\_version\\_5\\_5.pdf](http://www.karateworld.org/images/stories/Downloads/wkf_competition_rules_english_version_5_5.pdf) p.52.

<sup>102</sup> 野原耕栄、沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変容、p.128.

<sup>103</sup> WKF rules can be found at the following link

<http://www.seigokanhk.com/html/files/KarateCompetitionRules.pdf>

<sup>104</sup> WKF rules p.30.

<sup>105</sup> WKF rules p.28.

competitions. These are:

- a. *A realistic demonstration of the Kata meaning.*
- b. *Understanding of the techniques being used (BUNKAI).<sup>106</sup>*



**kata competition**

In a competition, the karateka have to perform both compulsory kata or 'shitei' (指定) kata and free or 'tokui' (得意) kata.<sup>107</sup> Both type of kata have to be selected from a list which includes kata from the four main Japanese styles: Gōjyūryū (剛柔流), Wadōryū (和道流), Shitōryū (糸東流) and Shōtōkan (松涛館).<sup>108</sup>

The number of kata that has to be performed in a competition depends on the number of contestants.<sup>109</sup>

#### Table

<i>Competitors</i>	<i>Kata required</i>	<i>Tokui</i>	<i>Shitei</i> <sup>110</sup>
<i>65-128</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>33-64</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>17-32</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>9-16</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>5-8</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>4</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>

### **4.3. Kata in the old days**

So what was kata before it became a part of a sport? What was its function in a karate training? How did it develop over time?

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<sup>106</sup> WKF rules p.28.

<sup>107</sup> WKF rules p.27.

<sup>108</sup> WKF rules p.51-52.

<sup>109</sup> WKF rules p.27.

<sup>110</sup> WKF rules p.27.

#### 4.3.1. The birth of karate kata

Ti is said to have been born out of the battles between the castles in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Many techniques were developed for combat. These were handed down over the generations. Between the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> century simple, short sequences of techniques were formed.<sup>111</sup> The Ryukyu became unified<sup>112</sup> into one kingdom in 1429,<sup>113</sup> and for the next 450 years there would be relative peace.<sup>114</sup> It is during this long and peaceful period that the Ti kata were further developed from the dangerous techniques and stylized into longer forms.<sup>115</sup>

The kata that were developed from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onward were often kept secret and only taught to those who were deemed trustworthy. The reason for this is that the practitioners of that time did not want the enemy to know their techniques. An enemy who knows the practitioners kata and its techniques can develop counter attacks against it,<sup>116</sup> in the same way modern athletes analyze their opponent's videos. Knowing your enemy is half the battle won.

#### 4.3.2.. New and ever changing kata

##### 4.3.2.1. Okinawan kata

The way kata were used in training in the past differed very much from today. Kata were the essence of karate training. Sparring was only a supporting method.<sup>117</sup> A karateka would spend about three years perfecting the techniques in one kata. Funakoshi Gichin trained for ten years to learn the three Tekki kata. Most experts knew only three to five kata. A form had to be trained so that its techniques could be applied in an emergency.

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<sup>111</sup> 野原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変容*、p.47.

<sup>112</sup> The unification was done by Sho Hashi (尚色志)

<sup>113</sup> 外間哲弘、*空手道歴史年表*、p.16.

<sup>114</sup> With the exception of the Satsuma invasion of 1609

<sup>115</sup> 野原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変容*、p.46.

<sup>116</sup> 野原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変容*、p.132.

<sup>117</sup> Gichin Funakoshi, *Karate-Dō Kyōhan: The Master Text*, p.211.

To just learn the sequence of a form was considered useless.<sup>118</sup> Okinawan karateka tend to be suspicious of karateka who know a great number of kata, as it is likely that the person does not have a deep understanding of its applications.<sup>119</sup>

We will now briefly discuss a few of the better documented changes to the kata.

Although there were some kata already in Ti, Chinese forms, or parts of them, would be introduced into the Ryukyu and altered to the already existing martial art. From the 18<sup>th</sup> century on there was a strong influence of Chinese martial arts. The local Ryukyu martial art would then be referred to by a name referring to its area. Ti(手) would be the original martial art while Tōdi (唐手) would refer to the martial art that has accepted several influences from China.<sup>120</sup>

Sanchin is such a kata that did not exist in Okinawa. It would have been imported by Higaonna Kanryō (東恩納寛量) from China in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>121</sup> Higaonna Kanryō had learned the kata with open hand. He adapted the form to closed hand as the basic fist was the fundament of Okinawan Ti.<sup>122</sup> The Okinawans also created kata even into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One senior pupil of Higaonna Kanryō (東恩納寛量), Miyagi Chōjun (宮城長順), created the kata Tenshō (転掌).<sup>123</sup> He would also introduce his created kata Gekki Sai Ichi (撃砕一) and Gekki Sai Ni (撃砕二) around the WWII period.<sup>124</sup>

The biggest changes to karate, kata and the objective of kata training was made by a man named Itosu Ankō (糸洲安恒). He took the martial art out of the shadows of secrecy and put it into the public's view.<sup>125</sup> The secretive martial art would officially become a class of physical education at the Teachers' College and the First Middle School in 1905.<sup>126</sup> To be able to change such a brutal martial art into a physical education class, many

<sup>118</sup> Gichin Funakoshi, *Karate-Dō Kyōhan: The Master Text*, p.38-39.

<sup>119</sup> 野原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変容*, p.148.

<sup>120</sup> 野原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変容*, p.146.

<sup>121</sup> 野原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変容*, p.146-147.

<sup>122</sup> 野原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変容*, p.369.

<sup>123</sup> 野原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変容*, p.340.

<sup>124</sup> 外間哲弘、*沖縄空手列伝百人*, p.53.

<sup>125</sup> Shoshin Nagamine, *I Grandi Maestri Di Okinawa*, p.75.

<sup>126</sup> 外間哲弘、*空手道歴史年表*, p.33.

changes had to be made. The kata was now taught to bigger groups, instead of on an individual basis. The vehicle of choice to teach karate to the school students was kata. Changes were made to make the techniques of kata more athletic and less dangerous. Kicks to the groin were taught as front kicks to the stomach or higher. Low side kicks to a knee joint would become high side kicks. Attacks to the eyes would become fist like attacks.<sup>127</sup> This new way of using kata changed its definition. It was not anymore a collection of dangerous movements to defend oneself, but a physical exercise for school kids. Itosu Anko created and altered kata so that they were more suitable for physical education. He created the five Pinan (ピンアン) kata<sup>128</sup>, which are supposedly based on the kata Channan (チャンナン).<sup>129</sup> These kata would help the young students to learn the fundamentals of karate. Kenji Tokitsu even states in his book that it would be a mistake to try to interpret these kata as techniques for combat.<sup>130</sup> Itosu Anko also split the longer Naihanchi (ナイハンチ) kata up into three shorter ones.<sup>131</sup>

Because of this reformation of karate for school, many of the older kata became lost forever.<sup>132</sup> The objective of kata as a tool to train for combat had completely shifted towards a form of physical education. The original dangerous applications that went with the kata were not taught to this new generation of karateka. It is mainly this type of karate and kata that became introduced to Japan.<sup>133</sup>

#### 4.3.2.2. Kata development in Japan's mainland

Funakoshi Gichin (船越義珍) and Mabuni Kenwa (摩文仁賢和) are two students of Itosu Ankō<sup>134</sup>, who were pioneers in introducing karate to the Japanese mainland in the twenties and thirties. They introduced these 'kata for school children' to the Japanese. There is even a theory that the

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<sup>127</sup> Kenji Tokitsu, *Storia del Karate: La Via della Mano Vuota*, p.60.

<sup>128</sup> 虎伯岩井、本部朝基と琉球カラテ、p.133.

<sup>129</sup> 野原耕栄、沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変容、p.72.

<sup>130</sup> Kenji Tokitsu, *Storia del Karate: La Via della Mano Vuota*, p.61.

<sup>131</sup> Kenji Tokitsu, *Storia del Karate: La Via della Mano Vuota*, p.60.

<sup>132</sup> Kenji Tokitsu, *Storia del Karate: La Via della Mano Vuota*, p.62.

<sup>133</sup> Patrick McCarthy, *The Bible of Karate: Bubishi*, p.53-54.

<sup>134</sup> Shoshin Nagamine, *I Grandi Maestri Di Okinawa*, p70, 72.



Okinawan masters deliberately taught a watered down version of karate to the Japanese. There was supposedly a secret agreement that could be summarized “Even if you teach kata, don’t teach Ti.” The applications and correct methods were deliberately withheld.<sup>135</sup> The historical cultural idea behind this is that Okinawa was in fact a recently occupied kingdom. The karateka, who were born in a kingdom that was forced to become a province, did not feel like teaching their secrets to their occupiers. But the question could be raised: Why did they leave their homes and Okinawa to deliberately go teach something wrong?

In 1936 there was a meeting with several Okinawan karate authorities. They searched for a way to unify the kata.<sup>136</sup> They wanted also that the classical kata remained untouched. They proposed the development of ten Japanese kata, with Japanese names. Another idea was to develop a national kata.<sup>137</sup> Twelve basic kata were in fact created and published in 1938, but they were never popularized.<sup>138</sup>

The first changes to the kata in Japan were done by an Okinawan karate master who had moved to Tōkyō, Funakoshi Gichin. He changed several names of existing kata. He wanted to give Japanese names to the kata and searched for kanji that fitted an image. The names of kata were often just a sound with some influence from the Original Ryūkyū or Chinese language. As a result several very similar kata have two different names, depending on the style they are practiced in.

#### Kata Name Changes by Funakoshi<sup>139</sup>

Okinawan	Okinawan	Japanese	Japanese
ピンアン初段	Pinan Shodan	平安二段	Heian Nidan
ピンアン二段	Pinan Nidan	平安初段	Heian Shodan
ピンアン三段	Pinan Sandan	平安三段	Heian Sandan
ピンアン四段	Pinan Yondan	平安四段	Heian Yondan

<sup>135</sup> 源之助松垣、隠されていた空手「型は教えても手は教えるな」に隠された謎を解明する、p.57.

<sup>136</sup> Hokama Tetsuhiro, *Timeline of Karate History: Pre-History to 2000*, p.65.

<sup>137</sup> Patrick McCarthy, *Ancient Okinawan Martial Arts: Koryu Uchinadi*, p.65.

<sup>138</sup> 仲宗根源和、*空手道大観*

<sup>139</sup> 船越義珍、*空手道教範*、p.33-35.

ピンアン五段	Pinan Godan	平安五段	Heian Godan
ナイハンチ初段	Naihanchi Shodan	鉄騎初段	Tekki Shodan
ナイハンチ二段	Naihanchi Nidan	鉄騎二段	Tekki Nidan
ナイハンチ三段	Naihanchi Sandan	鉄騎三段	Tekki Sandan
パッサイ	Passai	拔塞	Bassai
公相君	Kushanku	観空	Kanku
ワンシュウ	Wanshu	燕飛	Enpi
チントウ	Chinto	岩鶴	Gankaku
ジッテ	Jitte	十手	Jitte
セーシャン	Seishan	半月	Hangetsu
ジオン	Jion	慈恩	Jion

Note: Tekki Shodan ~ Tekki Sandan (鉄騎初段～三段) were mentioned as Kiba-dachi Shodan ~ Sandan (騎馬立ち初段～三段) in the original 1935 edition of `Karatedō kyōhan` (空手道教範)

The next major step was the introduction of kata competition, shifting the martial value of kata to that of sport. Karateka would be judged on their performance of the kata sequence. The knowledge of its actual applications was not a verifiable criterium for the judges. Karateka who would train for these competitions would therefore spend almost no time practicing the applications of the techniques.<sup>140</sup> The training time is instead used to perfect the sequence of movements in a way to appeal to the judges. The kata became little by little more adapted to the sport. Movements were made prettier, bigger and more elegant. Designated kata or `shitei` (指定) kata were created to simplify judging. These `shitei` kata were made by the Japanese and based on the Okinawan kata. These new variations of older kata were even further removed from combat as the changes were made to simplify judging, not to prepare for real life encounters. Most practitioners do not know the difference anymore between the original Okinawan kata and the newer sports form.<sup>141</sup>

In some dojo in Okinawa these older kata are still taught. But when the students enter a high school or university club and want to compete they need to adapt their original kata so that it matches the `shitei` form.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>140</sup> Matsuo Kanenori Sakon, *The Secret Royal Martial Arts of Ryukyu*, p.51.

<sup>141</sup> 野原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変容*, p.296-297.

<sup>142</sup> 野原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変容*, p.313.

Even Japanese styles have to adapt their kata training so they fit the requirements of the `shitei` kata. For example, a karateka of the Gōjū (剛柔) style who performs Seienchin (セーエンチン、制引戦) at a competition as a `shitei` kata has to perform it in the way it is done in the Shitō style.<sup>143</sup> The older kata are now known by only a very small percentage of today's karateka. A karateka training for `sundome` competition and kata competition is training the Japanese sport and not the Okinawan martial art for self defense.<sup>144</sup>

Modern kata competitions demand from young athletes to perform several kata. The number of kata a competition participant knows today is more than most of the Okinawan karateka knew before the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The objectives of training kata are different now: winning a competition versus having a deep understanding of its combative application. Most of these participants perform their several kata graciously but have almost no clue on how to use the applications in a real life situation. Older Okinawan kata will hardly ever have jumps as stability is very important.<sup>145</sup> Karateka who only participate in kumite competition hardly ever train kata at all. In a magazine sold at the world championships of 2008 in Tokyo there is even a manga that encourages people not to train traditional basics anymore and just focus on techniques that are used in competition. In the training schedule proposed, there is not even any kata training.<sup>146</sup>

The kata originated in Okinawa has lost its value for certain modern Japanese karate styles. The strict forms, of which most applications have been lost in time, are not considered useful training tools anymore for some of the more pragmatic full contact karate styles. Ashihara Kaikan (芦原會館) and Enshin Kaikan (円心会館), both styles created in the 1980s, no longer use kata that are based on the Okinawan ones. New kata were created that reflected directly the way these styles fight. It looks more like a shadowboxing exercise where one movement flows into the other. High kicks and spinning kicks are abundant in these kata. The kata movements can be used in their sparring system without modification.

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<sup>143</sup> WKF rules p.50.

<sup>144</sup> 野原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変容*、p.316.

<sup>145</sup> 外間哲弘、金城政和、*沖縄の古武道具・鍛錬道具*、p.192.

<sup>146</sup> *Japan Karatedo Fan 2008 vol. 71* p.69.

This is different compared to older styles where there is a much bigger gap between the techniques used in sparring and the techniques found in the kata. To give some examples: A high roundhouse kick may score three points in a sundome competition but there is not a single traditional kata that includes a high roundhouse kick. A low side kick can be found in some older kata, but it is not allowed in the sundome competition format.

#### **4.4. Revival of kata**

Several pioneers have been trying to find the original realistic applications as a reaction to the general lack of understanding of the movements in kata. Their objective is to bring back the usefulness of kata training for fighting and self defense. The historical evolution of kata explains why it is not an easy task to find bunkai for these altered kata.

There are two ways, often used together, for retrieving the applications of the movements in a kata. The first one is through historical research. This includes studying old documents in their original language and interviews with experienced, older practitioners. Patrick McCarthy, Hokama Tetsuhiro (外間哲弘) and Joe Swift are examples of historians who belong to this group, which doesn't exclude them from the second group.

The second way to reconstruct the applications of the movements is based on experience. Karateka who both have real combat experience and a deep understanding of kata can find the common ground between kata and combat. They see the movements of kata as actual combat, and link a realistic application to movements of the kata that are almost identical. Vince Morris, Iain Abernethy and Jos Robert are examples of this group.

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

Karate kata have changed a lot over time. Kata were initially stylized forms of battle tested techniques used for practicing and teaching. Itosu Ankō (糸洲安恒) changed the purpose of kata from combat preparation to physical education. His students introduced those kata to the Japanese, possibly withholding the efficient applications. Some kata were given Japanese names in order to popularize karate in Japan.

Kata became more and more practiced for the competition where the beauty

of the form is judged, not the combative value. Kata were altered to simplify judging. Some modern karate styles have completely abandoned the kata that are based on the Okinawan traditional ones.

A small but steadily growing group of karateka is reinstating the combative aspects in kata. Through both historical research and practical experience, a new life is being breathed into kata practice.

## 5. Equipment

### 5.1. Protectors, weapons and training equipment today

Protective equipment allows karateka to train and compete in a safer way. Most full contact styles, like Kyokushin (極真) and Enshin (円心), don't allow any protective gear for adults except for a mouthpiece, a groin cup for men and a breast protector for women.<sup>147</sup> The objective of these competitions is to score points by doing damage, within the rules, to the other person. Some full contact karate styles, like Kūdō (空道) / Daidōjuku (大道塾) do use protective gear.<sup>148</sup>

More protective equipment is used in light contact competitions than in most full contact styles. Damage to the other participant is considered a foul. The use of protective equipment is better developed in these competitions as safety is a priority. We will look at the WKF regulations as the example for light contact competitions. The athletes need a mouthpiece and have to wear blue or red WKF approved mitts, shin pads and foot protectors. Women must wear a WKF approved breast protector while men may wear a WKF approved groin guard if they wish.<sup>149</sup>

The fighters have to buy the approved gloves, shin and foot protectors, both in red and blue. Once the market for a



**Face Mask**

certain item has been saturated a new item will be introduced. This happens when most competitive fighters have bought the approved equipment. These new items will be made mandatory for competition, so every fighter has to buy them. The newest equipment introduced is a face mask.



**wkf approved equipment**

<sup>147</sup> <http://sabaki.enshin.com/rules.html>

<http://www.ibk.nl/images/stories/ibk-amateur-kumite-rules/the-official-ibk-amateur-kumite-rules.pdf> p.10.

<sup>148</sup> 東孝、着衣総合格闘技空道入門 *What is Kudo?*, p.15.

<sup>149</sup> WKF rules can be found at:

[http://www.karateworld.org/images/stories/Downloads/wkf\\_competition\\_rules\\_english\\_version\\_\\_5\\_.pdf](http://www.karateworld.org/images/stories/Downloads/wkf_competition_rules_english_version__5_.pdf)

WKF rules p.5.

Impact equipments like pads, mitts, kicking shields and sandbags are often used by the full contact forms of karate. Training to transfer kinetic energy in these types of equipment is considered a useful training method to develop powerful blows. These equipments are hardly used by karateka who participate in sundome competitions. Hard impact is considered a foul and thus training to be able to deliver those would be counterproductive.

Full contact fighters often supplement their karate training with a weight lifting routine.<sup>150</sup> The stronger muscles can deliver more power but also serve as padding. Thicker muscles protect the organs, bones and tissue underneath. Sundome fighters in general don't train with weights. The general argument given is that weight gained, through bigger and stronger muscle, would slow you down.

Weapon training amongst karateka is rarely seen in most dojo.

## **5.2. Equipment before the Second World War**

### **5.2.1. Protectors**

The idea of free sparring, and the injuries that go along with it, came only after the introduction of karate into Japan in the 1920s. Free sparring till then was only done in the form of 'kakedameshi' and served as a supplemental training form to kata.

Karate was introduced to the Japanese university students and they experimented a lot with protective gear to develop a realistic competition format.

The young Japanese athletes wanted to test their skill in free sparring. Funakoshi Gichin (船越義珍) opposed this because he considered kata training more than sufficient and did not want to make karate a sport. Others, like Motobu Chōki (本部朝基) and Mabuni Kenwa (摩文仁賢和), researched the possibilities of free combat. Mabuni started experimenting with baseball and kendō armor<sup>151</sup> around 1927. He wanted to find a safe way to conduct karate sparring.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> エド・ゾレンスキー、二宮城光、*KARATE 円心メソッド*、p.178-180.

<sup>151</sup> 岩井虎伯、*本部朝基と琉球カラテ*、p.183.

<sup>152</sup> 外間哲弘、*空手道歴史年表*、p.40.



Kenwa Mabuni on the left

Miki Jizaburou (三木二三郎), a student of Funakoshi, developed a competition format using protective equipment at the Toudai university (東大).<sup>153</sup> In 1930 a competition was organized and the protective gear consisted of five parts: helmet, body armor, groin protector, shin protectors and wrist protectors.<sup>154</sup> Injuries were common but experimenting and the development of protective gear for sparring continued until the end of the 1930s.<sup>155</sup> Most, if not all, karate practice ceased during World War II. In 1952 a new type of competition system was

developed: sundome (寸止め). Kicks and punches would be pulled, although it remained a rough affair. Protective equipment was not really required anymore as contestants would pull their blows. Karate spread through the university clubs all over Japan once this safe competition format was formed. Karate became popular worldwide from the 60s onwards. The WKF is now trying to make karate an Olympic sport. Its competition format has to be even safer than it already is to achieve this. Hence, more and more protective equipment is reintroduced, as we have seen in the beginning of the chapter. The evolution of competitive rules and protective equipment has strongly been influenced by Taekwondo, which is already an Olympic sport.

### 5.2.2. Equipment for strength training

Strength has always been an attribute important to fighters. Traditional Okinawan karate incorporates strength training in most of its workouts. A small part of the training is dedicated to lifting heavy objects. The objects that were used were mostly objects found in everyday life and adapted to the karateka's needs. We will give a list of the most common objects that were

<sup>153</sup> 原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変*, p.265.

<sup>154</sup> 原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変*, p.268.

<sup>155</sup> Kenji Tokitsu, *Storia del Karate: La Via della Mano Vuota*, p.189.



used.

1. Chishi (据石) : A stone weight at the end of a wooden handle.<sup>156</sup>



2. Sāshi (錠形石) : Stone weights with handles.<sup>157</sup>



3. Kāmi (壺) : A gripping jar that can be gradually filled with sand as training levels progress.<sup>158</sup>



4. Tan (担) : A pole with at both ends weights, similar to the modern barbell but used in a different manner. An example of an exercise: The `tan` was placed in the neck. The `tan` was then rolled from the neck, over the back to the hip and back up to the neck by bending at the waist to control the descent.<sup>159</sup>

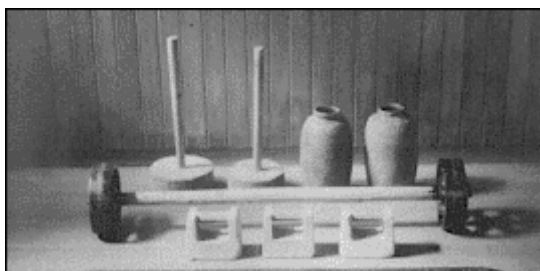
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<sup>156</sup> 外間哲弘、金城政和、*沖縄の古武道具・鍛錬道具*、p.145.

<sup>157</sup> 外間哲弘、金城政和、*沖縄の古武道具・鍛錬道具*、p.149.

<sup>158</sup> 外間哲弘、金城政和、*沖縄の古武道具・鍛錬道具*、p.154.

<sup>159</sup> 外間哲弘、金城政和、*沖縄の古武道具・鍛錬道具*、p.163.



5. Tetsuwa (鉄輪) : Iron ring<sup>160</sup>



6. Ishibukuro (石袋) : A net or bag filled with round stones. The bag was thrown at each other to learn how to dodge. Finger strength and reflexes were trained by catching the bag.<sup>161</sup>

7. Sashiishi (差し石) : A heavy stone. Later, a wooden handle would go through the stone so it would stick out on both sides. It would then look like a dumbbell but the weight would be in the middle.<sup>162</sup> (Picture: far left below)



12. Ishigeta (石下駄) or Tetsugeta (鉄下駄): Stone or iron clogs. Inspired by wooden clogs.<sup>163</sup>

<sup>160</sup> 外間哲弘、金城政和、*沖縄の古武道具・鍛錬道具*、p.167.

<sup>161</sup> 外間哲弘、金城政和、*沖縄の古武道具・鍛錬道具*、p.168.

<sup>162</sup> 外間哲弘、金城政和、*沖縄の古武道具・鍛錬道具*、p.170

<sup>163</sup> 外間哲弘、金城政和、*沖縄の古武道具・鍛錬道具*、p.171.



13. Nigiritaba (握り束) : Crushed bamboo that was tied together. It was used to train finger strength. Non karate practitioners witnessed karateka training with this tool and assumed that a karateka could crush bamboo with his bare hands.<sup>164</sup>

Karate shifted more and more from a martial art to a sport after the Second World War. Grabbing, throws or actual impact were often not allowed in competition. Finger strength or strength in general was not anymore an asset that had to be developed. Karateka, after participating in full contact competitions, started to revalue the benefits of strength training. The extra muscular padding and power seemed beneficial for full contact competitions. They adapted more modern and scientific training methods and equipment like free weights and modern fitness equipment.<sup>165</sup>

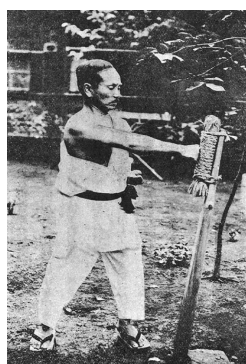
### 5.2.3. Impact equipment

Karate is a martial art that includes punches, kicks, elbows, knees, hand ridges, throws, locks, etc... The majority of the techniques are impact techniques. A hard target will be used to deliver kinetic force to an anatomical weak point. Karateka experimented in different ways to deliver impact. They developed all kinds of impact equipment to help with their practice. The first 'impact equipment' that was used: the bashō (芭蕉) or banana tree. The use of the banan tree as a training object came from the need for the fibers of the tree to make clothes. To get the fibers, the tree was damaged on purpose so that it would start to rot. Fists were used, as it was important not to cut the fibers during the damaging of the tree. It would become a method to toughen the fists. This practice showed that the knuckles of the index finger and the middle finger tend to heal quickly but

<sup>164</sup> 外間哲弘、金城政和、*沖縄の古武道具・鍛錬道具*、p.172.

<sup>165</sup> エド・ゾレンスキー、二宮城光、*KARATE 円心メソッド*、p.179-180.

the other two knuckles are weaker and take more time to heal. As the fists became stronger, karateka shifted to tougher trees, like the Chinese fan palm.<sup>166</sup> Tougher trees were often wrapped with straw. This practice of hitting banana trees became used to also teach children as most gardens also had banana trees. These banana trees were given the chance to heal by rotating the sides wher they were hit.<sup>167</sup>



**Funakoshi Gichin**

The `makiwara` (巻藁) is a striking post where the striking surface is wrapped with straw, rope, leather or anything else that absorbs a bit of the impact.<sup>168</sup> It was inspired by the use of banana trees as a training objects. The makiwara was considered by Okinawan karateka as a fundamental tool for practice. Although Funakoshi Gichin (船越義珍) focused on kata and Motobu Chōki (本部朝基) was more combat orientated, both men considered makiwara training a vital part of their karate.<sup>169</sup>

Karate competition started to evolve after the Second World War. Toughening the hands was not as important anymore with the introduction of protective gloves. The sundome rules would become the accepted norm. Makiwara training did not fit anymore in the new athletes training curricula as hard hitting was not the objective in these competitions. Full contact competition came as a reaction to the sundome rules. Being able to deliver great impact became a necessary skill again. This



**Motobu Chōki**

resulted to the reintroduction of the importance of impact trainig. Modern equipment would be introduced from boxing and Muay Thai: punching pads, kicking pads and sandbags. These equipments have become standard in most full contact styles up till the present.<sup>170</sup>

<sup>166</sup> *Livistona Chinensis*

<sup>167</sup> 原耕栄、沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変, p.330-332.

<sup>168</sup> 外間哲弘、金城政和、沖縄の古武道具・鍛錬道具、p.139.

<sup>169</sup> Gichin Funakoshi, *Karate-Dō Kyōan*, p.251.

岩井虎伯、本部朝基と琉球カラテ、p.16-17.

<sup>170</sup> エド・ゾレンスキー、二宮城光、*KARATE 円心メソッド*, p.146-159.

芦原英幸、実戦！芦原カラテ3, p.139.

A special type of impact and toughening equipment was the `sunbako` (砂箱). It can be any type of container, for instance a bucket, which is filled with round stones, sand or beans. A karateka would thrust their fingers and fist into the container. The practitioner's hands would toughen by gradually building up the intensity and the amounts of thrusts.<sup>171</sup> This training is particular useful for open hand techniques like finger jabs to the eyes or throat. These techniques are considered extremely dangerous and are therefore forbidden in all competition formats. Therefore this type of training equipment is hardly ever seen these days.

#### 5.2.4. Weapons

Non of the full contact styles and only a few `traditional` styles of karate incorporate weapons in their training curricula. Karate is now known as an `empty hand` martial art. Yet, the warriors who practiced Ti, the forefather of karate, spend a great amount of time training with weapons.

The battles between the seventh and the twelfth century gave birth to both Ti and weapons training. The weapons training is referred to as `kobujutsu` (古武術) meaning `old martial techniques`, or `kobudō` (古武道) meaning `old martial ways`. The techniques developed further during the battles that took place between the twelfth and the fifteenth century. These techniques of Ti and weapons were formalized in kata during the rather peaceful period of the King dynasties between the fifteenth and the eighteenth century.<sup>172</sup>

The reason of the secrecy and nature of the weapons has several reasons. The lack of iron has already been mentioned. Not showing your techniques to the enemy is another explanation for its secretive nature. A third argument would be the two weapon bans. The first weapon ban was enforced after the unification of the three kingdoms in 1429. The second weapon ban was implemented by outsiders. In 1609 the Satsuma clan, a clan of Japanese samurai, invaded the kingdom and abolished the private ownership of weapons.<sup>173</sup> So the warrior's class had to train in secrecy, with whatever tools that were not considered obvious weapons, like farming

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<sup>171</sup> 外間哲弘、金城政和、*沖縄の古武道具・鍛錬道具*, p.160

<sup>172</sup> 野原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Ti)の変容*, p.46-47.

<sup>173</sup> 外間哲弘、金城政和、*沖縄の古武道具・鍛錬道具*, p.53.

equipment. Most of those tools were made out of wood due the lack of iron in the Ryūkyū.

`Kobudō` never had the success karate had in the Japanese mainland. The Japanese already had a rich history of armed combat and technically highly developed weapons like the katana (刀). The weapons of kobudo seemed primitive and ineffective compared to the Japanese weapons. Ti on the other hand had the chance to develop over the centuries due to the lack of highly effective weapons. Therefore Ti was welcomed by the Japanese in a period after also Japan had its own weapon ban and elimination of the samurai class in the early 1870s.<sup>174</sup>

A list of the most common kobudō weapons and some theories about their origins:

Nunchaku (双節棍) : Two sticks attached with a rope, hair or chain.

Origins: 1. A horse bit; 2. A flail to thresh rice; 3. Simplified version of the Chinese three section staff<sup>175</sup>



Bō (棒) : A long wooden staff.

Origins: 1. Most basic primitive weapon; 2. Long stick to carry buckets on ones shoulders; 3. A spear with the tip broken off in battle; 4. Chinese staff with iron tips on both sides<sup>176</sup>



Tonfā (トンファー) :

<sup>174</sup> Martin Collcut, Marius Jansen and Isao Kumakura, *Cultural Atlas of Japan*, p.173.

<sup>175</sup> 外間哲弘、金城政和、*沖縄の古武道具・鍛錬道具*, p.61-71.

<sup>176</sup> 外間哲弘、金城政和、*沖縄の古武道具・鍛錬道具*, p.73.

Origins: 1. Similarities to a weapon in Thailand; 2. Handle of a millstone<sup>177</sup>



Sai (釵) : Used by peacekeepers.

Origin: The sai was probably imported from China.



Kama (鎌) : A sickle

Origin: A sickle is a farming tool that is still in common use in Okinawa and mainland Japan.<sup>178</sup>



Kuwa (鍬) : A hoe.

Origin: A hoe is a garden tool with a long handle and a blade or pins, used for breaking up the soil and removing weeds. Its original form was not altered for kobudo training.<sup>179</sup>



Ekū (櫂) : An oar

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<sup>177</sup> 外間哲弘、金城政和、*沖縄の古武道具・鍛錬道具*, p.81-87.

<sup>178</sup> 外間哲弘、金城政和、*沖縄の古武道具・鍛錬道具*, p.98-101.

<sup>179</sup> 外間哲弘、金城政和、*沖縄の古武道具・鍛錬道具*, p.103.

Origin: An oar used for rowing a boat. The inhabitants of the many small islands depended on fishing for their survival. Certain Eku kata contain movements that resemble scooping up sand or water towards the opponents face.<sup>180</sup>



Suruchin (スルチン) : A chain with on both ends a weight.

Origin: A rope with on both ends a stone attached. Probably used as a hunting tool. The small size of the weapon makes it convenient to carry around.<sup>181</sup>



Tinbē (ティンペー) and Rōchin (ローチン) : Small shield and short spear.

Origin: The shield is often a turtle shell. A spear is a common basic weapon in most cultures.<sup>182</sup>



Tetsukō, Tekkō (鉄甲) : A tool used for punching and very similar to modern brass knuckles.

Origin: A horseshoe used for more punching power. Two horseshoes could also be tied or welded together.<sup>183</sup>

<sup>180</sup> 外間哲弘、金城政和、*沖縄の古武道具・鍛錬道具*, p.106.

<sup>181</sup> 外間哲弘、金城政和、*沖縄の古武道具・鍛錬道具*, p.110.

<sup>182</sup> 外間哲弘、金城政和、*沖縄の古武道具・鍛錬道具*, p.113-119.

<sup>183</sup> 外間哲弘、金城政和、*沖縄の古武道具・鍛錬道具*, p.120-121.





### 5.3. Conclusion


The use of protective gear is one way that karateka try to train as close as possible to real combat but within the margins of safety. Different styles and karateka have their own view on this. Some attack sensitive parts of the body, but without contact. Others spar full power but limit their attacks to stronger parts of the body. Some use protective gear for extra safety, while others believe this is counterproductive. The quality of safety equipment improves as new, lighter and stronger materials are developed. Different types of sparring all have their strengths and weaknesses for training purposes.

Weapons were initially considered a vital part of a warriors training. The weapon bans led to the use of common objects as effective weapons. Therefore most of the weapons used in karate come from objects which have a practical farming application.

## 6. Clothing, belts and ranks

### 6.1. Karate uniform, black and colored belts

A karate practitioner wears in general a white uniform, called `karategi` (空手着 or 空手衣) or `dōgi` (道着). It is sometimes erroneously referred to as a `kimono` (着物), which actually is a traditional Japanese piece of clothing item.

The white uniform consists out of long sleeved pants and a long sleeved jacket. The jacket is closed with a black, white or colored belt. The color of the belt shows the rank of the wearer. The order in which the colors of the belts are given depends on the style, and even differs sometimes between karate clubs. This order can mostly be divided into two categories: the `traditional` styles<sup>184</sup> and the `full contact` styles.<sup>185</sup> The most common order of the colored belts from beginner to higher level for the `traditional` styles is: white, yellow, orange, green, blue and brown. 

The most common order for the `full contact` styles is: white, blue, yellow, green and brown. Each color equals a rank or kyū (級). These karateka are referred to as `mudansha` (無段者), meaning `those without a dan`.<sup>186</sup> The white belt indicates that the practitioner is still a beginner. The colored belts show that the person already has had some training but still has a lot to learn. The highest rank, right before the shodan or black belt (初段), is called the first kyū or ikkyū (一級). Although the dan (段) levels count up as the karateka advances from first till tenth dan, the kyū count down. So an eight kyū or hachikyū (八級) would be lower than a seventh kyū or nanakyū (七級). The reason that there are more kyū than belt colors is that sometimes the same belt is used for two or three different kyū.

The first black belt, or shodan (初段), shows that the wearer has a very good understanding of the basics. He is called a `yūdansha` (有段者), a holder of rank.<sup>187</sup> The black belt may stand for a first dan, but it may be even a tenth dan in some karate styles. In some schools, high ranking dan is not shown by a black belt but rather by a belt with the combination of red and/or

<sup>184</sup> Gōjyūryū (剛柔流), Wadōryū (和道流), Shitōryū (糸東流), Shōtōkan (松涛館), ...

<sup>185</sup> Kyōkushin (極真), Ashihara Kaikan (芦原會館), Enshin Kaikan (円心會館), ...

<sup>186</sup> Patrick McCarthy, *Ancient Okinawan Martial Arts: Koryu Uchinadi*, p.76

<sup>187</sup> Patrick McCarthy, *Ancient Okinawan Martial Arts: Koryu Uchinadi*, p.76.

white.<sup>188</sup>

But when were these uniforms, belts and ranks seen for the first time in history? What ranks did the old masters hold? Where did the first uniforms and ranks come from?

### 6.2.1. Karategi: from casual wear to a uniform

Before a karate uniform became generally accepted, a karateka would wear whatever clothes they found suitable for their training. Few clothes were worn during practice, as the small islands of Okinawa are very hot and humid. They often trained with bare chest and comfortable pants.



Miyagi Chōjun left

The first time a karateka wore a white uniform for karate was on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May, 1922 in Tōkyō. Funakoshi Gichin (富名腰義珍 or 船越義珍) was invited by Kanō Jigorō (嘉納治五郎), the creator of jūdō (柔道), to give a karate demonstration. Kanō Jigorō had shown interest in karate at a previous demonstration and therefore invited Funakoshi to give a demonstration at the Kōdōkan (講道館), Kanō's jūdō dōjō.<sup>189</sup>

Funakoshi bought white textile and made himself the first karategi for the demonstration. He made one for him and one for Gima Shinkin (儀間真謹), an Okinawan karate practitioner who would assist him in the demonstration.

<sup>190</sup> These first white karategi were based on the Japanese jūdōgi (柔道着).<sup>191</sup> The karategi became more and more popular in Japan. We can find an advertisement, dating from 1934, for 'karategi' being made in Tōkyō.<sup>192</sup>

On October 25, 1936 a group consisting out of mainly Okinawan karateka, had a meeting to discuss several items concerning the future of karate.<sup>193</sup> One of the topics they agreed on was that karate had to "adopt a standard

<sup>188</sup> From the 7<sup>th</sup> dan, the karate practitioner wears a red and white belt at the Okinawan Kenshi-Kai, Karate-Jutsu Kobu-Jutsu Association

<sup>189</sup> 野原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変容*, p.91.

<sup>190</sup> Kenji Tokitsu, *Storia del Karate: La Via della Mano Vuota*, p.88.

<sup>191</sup> 外間哲弘、*空手道歴史年表*, p.37.

<sup>192</sup> 仲宗根源和、*空手研究*, p.135.

<sup>193</sup> Hokama Tetsuhiro, *Timeline of Karate History: Pre-History to 2000*, p.65.

uniform”.<sup>194</sup> Karate uniforms, although not standardized yet, were increasingly used by students in Okinawa from 1938.<sup>195</sup>

When karate spread to the four corners of the world after the Second World War, so did the karategi. The white karategi in general has been accepted as the standard training and competition uniform for karate all over the world.

### 6.2.2. Ranks and belts

Before 1924, belts and ranks in karate were non-existent. No karate master or student had a black belt, dan or kyū rank before this date. You just had a teacher and his students. The existence of a belt that showed the outside world your rank was something unheard of.

Kanō Jigorō (嘉納治五郎) had introduced the dan/kyū system to jūdō to motivate the students and to systemize his teachings. Around 1907 the black belt was used in jūdō for dan holders.<sup>196</sup> The belt and ranking system of Karate was inspired by the belt system of jūdō.

The first time a black belt was worn for karate was by Funakoshi Gichin and Gima Shinkin (儀間真謹) in the demonstration of 1922 at Kanō's jūdō dōjō. Funakoshi did at first not want to wear the jūdō black belt in front of the jūdō practitioners. Eventually they strapped on a black belt according to the advice of Kanō to wear whatever belt there was available. After the demonstration, Funakoshi changed back to his regular sash.<sup>197</sup> Funakoshi did not have a dan rank for karate at that time, nor did anybody else.

The first official dan rank for karate was awarded by Funakoshi Gichin (富名腰義珍 or 船越義珍).<sup>198</sup> He awarded the rank of Shodan (初段) on the twelfth of April in 1924 to several students, and Nidan (二段 or 二段) to a few others.<sup>199</sup> The Dai Nippon Butokukai demanded in the 1930's that karate would adapt Kanō's dan/kyū system and a system for evaluating the

<sup>194</sup> Patrick McCarthy, *Ancient Okinawan Martial Arts: Koryu Uchinadi*, p.65.

<sup>195</sup> 外間哲弘、*空手道歴史年表*, p.44.

<sup>196</sup> Patrick McCarthy, *Ancient Okinawan Martial Arts: Koryu Uchinadi*, p.77.

<sup>197</sup> Kenji Tokitsu, *Storia del Karate: La Via della Mano Vuota*, p.89.

<sup>198</sup> 野原耕栄、*沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変容*, p.267.

<sup>199</sup> 外間哲弘、*空手道歴史年表*, p.38.

Amongst the receivers of the rank are Gima Shinkin (儀間真謹), Kasuya Shinyo (粕谷真洋), Otsuka Hironori (大塚博紀) and Konishi Yasushiro (小西康裕)

grade of proficiency.<sup>200</sup> Karate also started using black belts for dan holders. As such, karate became closer to the ideal of a Japanese `traditional` martial art. The Okinawan Karate-do Federation only gave its first dan ranks after the Second World War. On the thirtieth of December 1960 it awarded forty Shodan (初段), twenty three Nidan (二段) and twenty five Sandan (三段).

We have seen that the adoption of Kano`s dan/kyū system, together with the black belt, came from jūdō into karate under the pressure of the Dai Nippon Butokukai. However, the colored belts are not credited to Kanō.

The first time colored belts showed up in jūdō was in Europe. Kawaishi Mikonosuke (川石酒造之助) was a jūdō teacher and introduced the colored belts in 1935 in Europe while he was teaching in Paris. He felt that this system was more suitable for the West. The order of the colors was white, yellow, orange, green, blue, purple, brown and black.<sup>201</sup> Karate adapted this system for its own mudansha (無段者).

The dan/kyū system, together with the colored and black belts, were adopted from jūdō to karate during a period when jūdō was seen as the example for `Japanese` martial arts.

### 6.3. Conclusion

The white uniform, ranks and belts of karate only appeared for the first time in history less than a century ago. They were derived from those of jūdō. The first white clothing for karate was made by Funakoshi in 1922 for a demonstration. In 1924 the first dan ranks were awarded to karateka by the same man. It all became a part of the image of karate.

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<sup>200</sup> Patrick McCarthy, *The Bible of Karate: Bubishi*, p.55.

<sup>201</sup> <http://www.judoinfo.com/obi.htm>      <http://www.judoinfo.com/kawaishi.htm>

## 7. The Karateka

### 7.1. The modern karateka

Today karate is practiced in more than 140 different countries.<sup>202</sup> The karateka range from young athletes, kids, adults, the physically challenged and elderly. Men as well as women train in this martial art, although the latter are still a minority.

### 7.2. The evolution of the karateka

The first practitioners of the martial art that would become later known as karate were warriors. They used their skills in battle during the conflicts between the many castles in the Ryūkyū, and we can only imagine that those who trained for battle took it seriously. For centuries these men developed their combat skills and the warrior class was the ruling class.

These warrior elite developed also their academic skills and looked for inspiration to China. The Chinese culture would have an impact on the Ryūkyū from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards.<sup>203</sup> The warriors would have some influence from the Chinese martial arts, but the real foreign influences on the local martial art would be of a much bigger significance from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards. In the 1770s, a servant of the king named Sakugawa Kanga (佐久川寛賀), left for China as an envoy. He also learned more about the Chinese martial arts during his visit. The notion of Tōdi (唐手) or 'Chinese hand' became only known in the Ryūkyū from after his return.<sup>204</sup> The practitioners of the martial art at that time were well educated men who were under the service of the king as peacekeepers or bodyguards. They had contact with the Chinese elite in their homeland<sup>205</sup> and some even had the chance to go to China. The 'Bubishi', the oldest historical document relating to karate, is written in Classical Chinese<sup>206</sup> and dates from around this period of strong Chinese influences. The practitioners of the local

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<sup>202</sup> 外間哲弘、空手道・古武道の真髄、p.10.

<sup>203</sup> Rosa Caroli, *Il Mito Dell' Omogeneità Giapponese: Storia Di Okinawa*, p.43.

<sup>204</sup> 野原耕栄、沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変容、p.256-257.

<sup>205</sup> Patrick McCarthy, *The Bible of Karate: Bubishi*, p.34.

<sup>206</sup> Patrick McCarthy, *The Bible of Karate: Bubishi*, p.27.

martial art were mostly elite warriors and royal bodyguards<sup>207</sup> up till the abolishment of the kingdom in 1872. So far there has been no evidence that non-warriors, like farmers, would have practiced the martial art at that time.<sup>208</sup>

The type of practitioners of the martial art changed drastically a few decades after the abolishment of the Ryūkyū kingdom. Itosu Ankō (糸洲安恒) lived during that period when the old kingdom was abolished. Itosu was 48 years old when the new prefecture of Okinawa (沖縄県) was born in 1879.<sup>209</sup> He would introduce karate to a new type of karateka: school students. He started teaching karate at the Shuri Jinjo Elementary School in 1901 and karate became a part of the physical education program at the First Middle School and the Teachers' College in 1905.<sup>210</sup> This is the period that karate stepped out of the shadows of secrecy. Yet, many of the secrets never became public and are now lost in time. Itosu Ankō created new kata, like the Pinan (ピンアン)<sup>211</sup>, and made the techniques safer for the new type of karateka. The karate he modified would become the fundamentals of the karate of today characterized by new kata, safe techniques and not much or no attention to the combat applications of the kata.

Several of his private students would introduce karate to the Japanese mainland. Mabuni Kenwa (摩文仁賢和) and Funakoshi Gichin (船越義珍) are two of his students who are mainly responsible for introducing karate to the Japanese. The Japanese they taught karate to were mainly university students. These Japanese were taught the 'modern karate' of Itosu Ankō. But the students were not satisfied with just learning basics and kata. They wanted to develop a competition format in the same manner that already existed for jūdō and kendō. Karate spread all over Japan through this third group of karateka: university students.

Karate had spread over Japan, but its development took a halt for a couple of years due to the Second World War. Japan lost the war and became occupied by the Americans until 1952.<sup>212</sup> Okinawa stayed officially

<sup>207</sup> 野原耕栄、沖縄伝統空手「手」(Tiy)の変容、p.329.

<sup>208</sup> Mark Bishop, *Karate di Okinawa : Maestri, Stili e Tecniche Segrete*, p.12-13.

<sup>209</sup> Shoshin Nagamine, *I Grandi Maestri Di Okinawa*, p.67.

<sup>210</sup> 外間哲弘、空手道歴史年表、p.32-33.

<sup>211</sup> 岩井虎伯、本部朝基と琉球カラテ、p.133.

<sup>212</sup> Martin Collcut, Marius Jansen and Isao Kumakura, *Cultural Atlas of Japan*, p.206.

occupied till 1972<sup>213</sup> but in fact still many American military bases are located there even today. The servicemen who were located in Japan came in touch with karate. The Americans had already been in contact with a karateka Yabu Kentsu, who travelled to Los Angeles in 1919 and Hawaii in 1927-1928.<sup>214</sup> But it is only during and after the occupation that the Americans were exposed to karate in bigger numbers. So the servicemen learned the Okinawan or more Japanese form of karate during their brief stay, depending on where they were located. They brought this martial art back to their home town where they would teach it. So the servicemen would become the fourth group of karate practitioners, followed by those Americans who they taught to.

In the 1950s an instructor training was organized by the JKA (Japan Karate Association) in Tōkyō. The first instructors graduated from the program in 1957. Their training was very intense and created a generation of well trained karateka. Several of these karateka went abroad to spread karate over the world in the 1960s.<sup>215</sup>

The majority of the Japanese instructors who went during the sixties abroad were formed at the universities in only four or five years. These young students stressed dynamism and spectacular movements. This is the type of karate that has been spread over the world. But, this type of karate is not suitable for people of older age.<sup>216</sup> Of course many karateka of different styles helped karate conquer the four corners of the world, but it would lead us into too much detail to analyze each one of them.

Karate has been an affair of men till recently. The art was limited to warriors and the male upper class. All karateka were men, except for some rare exceptions like Tsuru, the wife of Matsumura Sōkon (松村宗昆の妻ツル) .<sup>217</sup> A change of climate came due the influence of the American occupation after the Second World War. Women became more noticeable from the 1960s in karate. Itokazu Kame (糸数カメ) , Kamijo Kayoko (上門加代子) and Higa Kiyoko (比嘉清子) are some examples of female karateka

<sup>213</sup> Rosa Caroli, *Il Mito Dell' Omogeneità Giapponese: Storia Di Okinawa*, p.13.

<sup>214</sup> 外間哲弘、*沖縄空手列伝百人*, p.30-31.

<sup>215</sup> JKA official website: <http://www.jka.or.jp/english/about/chart.html>  
[http://www.hsk.co.uk/jka\\_history.htm](http://www.hsk.co.uk/jka_history.htm)

<sup>216</sup> Kenji Tokitsu, *Storia del Karate: La Via della Mano Vuota*, p.185.

<sup>217</sup> 外間哲弘、*沖縄空手列伝百人*, p.17.



of that age. They would open the world of karate to the women of today.<sup>218</sup>

Karateka nowadays range from UFC fighters like Lyoto Machida with a streak of 14 wins, children, amateur competition fighters in both full contact and point systems, women,... and even `traditionalists`.

### 7.3. Conclusion

The original Ryūkyū martial art `Ti` was practiced exclusively by noblemen and warriors. The art became introduced in the early 1900s to schoolchildren in the newly created province, Okinawa. University students were the first to receive the introduction of karate into the Japanese mainland from the 1920s. Karate spread to the rest of the world after the Second World War, partially due to the American servicemen, partially due to the effort of the Japanese themselves. The proportion of women in karate gradually increased from the 1960s onwards. As a result karateka range from true fearsome warriors to the kid who has no clue how to tie his own pants and everything in between.

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<sup>218</sup> 外間哲弘、*空手道歴史年表*、p.53.

## General conclusion

Karate changed and evolved overtime in almost every aspect. It has never been a fixed `tradition`. Every new generation has altered the martial art so it would suit their needs. Let us summarize when most `traditions` in karate started.

The first time the term karate was written as `empty hand` was in 1905. `Karatedō` as `The Way of the Empty Hand` has only existed since the 1930s. The first competitions were organized also around the 1930s. We had to wait until after the Second World War for the first sundome competitions in the early 1950s and the rise of full contact `Kyokushin` rules from the late 1950s, early 1960s. Kata go back to the period of unwritten history, but many have been altered or created since kata became part of Okinawan education in 1905. Experimenting with kendō and baseball equipment as protective armor started in the late 1920s. In the 1920s was also the first karate dan awarded and the first white gi used for karate.

A karateka who trains in a white karategi, wears a belt, participates in kata and kumite competitions, considers a roundhouse kick to head height a basic technique, limits his training to punching and kicking and because of all this, considers himself a `traditionalist` after reading this booklet, has not understood the message. These are all rather recent changes, each with its advantages and disadvantages.

I hope that the reader now has the same questions as me: `What is `traditional` karate if it changed so much?` and `Am I improving the art or am I re-inventing a missed lesson from the past?`

In karate there are many good ways but there is always a better way. Maybe that is why they call it karate-dō.

Filip Swennen

## Extras

Few karateka do strength training and those who do often don't understand the principles behind it, resulting in almost no progress or even worse, injury. It is important that a karateka does some research about these fundamental principles before starting a strength program. We will just touch the most important points.

Improving your strength is by combining the following: 1. Training 2. Nutrition 3. Rest. You will not make any significant strength gains if you skip any of these steps.

1. *Training:* Exercising damages your muscles. At the end of a training session you have less strength than before you started. You should write down what you exactly did, how heavy and how many times.
2. *Nutrition:* You need to give your body the building blocks to rebuild your muscles by consuming food. Your body will first use the building blocks and calories to breathe, digest, live your life, etc... Only if there is enough left after fulfilling all this will the extras be used for building your muscles stronger than before. You should give your body some food about every three hours to maximize strength gains. You won't give your muscles the necessary nutrients if you don't eat enough.
3. *Rest:* You should allow enough rest for your muscle to fully recover between two training sessions. Starting your next training while you are still sore means that you are working out with muscles that are still not fully repaired and thus not stronger yet than before. You need to give your body the time to use the nutrients you give it so it can fix everything a hundred percent. Only then should you start your next strength training.
4. *Training:* You will now be stronger than before and therefore your training should be a little bit more intense than before. You just have to look at your notes of last training and perform the exercise just a little bit heavier or a few more times.<sup>219</sup>

Please inform yourself well before you start strength training.

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<sup>219</sup> Sean Nalewanyj, *The Truth About Building Muscle*

### Fujioka's letter

(Fujioka was my karate teacher while I was working on this booklet during my stay in Japan. He is a direct student of Ashihara Hideyuki, the creator of the Ashihara karate style. You can find pictures of both of them together in the book: 芦原英幸、実戦！芦原カラテ3. I asked him to write something and this is the letter I received two weeks before my departure.)

“I started my dojo in 1991. Right there after, a club of Ashihara kaikan was started at the Budo University. Those students also came to train at my dojo. (After 5, 6 generations of leaders this club was closed.) There were also foreign research students who came for about one year to my dojo. In the same way, the foreign research student Filip came to my dojo on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April, 2008.

Filip has problems with his hip joint and his inner ear, which is a handicap for doing martial arts. But because of that, he knows what is his style and thinks about how he can adapt the techniques of Ashihara karate for him, and I admire his earnest learning attitude.

Ashihara karate is one of the full contact karate styles that separated itself from the modern karate, called Kyokushin. This Ashihara style uses the sabaki training system, which has the intention to control the other person or to unbalance them for a counter attack. This is different from the recent focus on competitions and slugfests. I think this training system is what Filip was looking for.

By creating openings through unbalancing the other person with small movements. Gaining control in a safe way and then knocking the other person down with a counter attack. Each technique in a combination should be done technically and the movements should not become sloppy. The movements should connect with each other. (For example: Starting the next kick or punch when the kicking leg is still going down.) Using circular movements where the other person is seen as the center while you go in straight line for the shortest distance. You should keep in mind the shifts of the center of gravity, the application of fulcrum and vectors and to not rely on your power. But muscular power is still a necessity. You need to train your trunk.

A lot of things are left to learn because he was only here for one year. In his karate training he learned Ashihara karate. Like me, he can absorb the Ashihara style in his karate. So I hope he will find his own logical answers based on what is mentioned above.

I hope that the trainings he had at the Ashihara Kaikan Isumi branch nurtures his further growth.”

OSU

New International Karatedo Association

Ashihara Kaikan

Isumi Branch

Shibucho: Fujioka Isao

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