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Analysis of  
**GENUINE  
KARATE**

*Misconceptions, Origins,  
Development, and True Purpose*

**Hermann Bayer, Ph.D.**

Foreword by Patrick McCarthy, Hanshi, 9th Dan

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## FOREWORD BY PATRICK MCCARTHY HANSHI 9<sup>TH</sup> DAN

Accurately understanding *why* is too crucial an element to dismiss when we seek to advance our skills and become successful in doing so. This couldn't be truer for an art developed for the purpose of self-defense.

In recent years there has been significant interest in finding a way back to the old-ways, to the original and more pragmatic approach to the art of karate. In spite of its current popularity as a cultural recreation and rule-bound competitive sport, much of today's karate has become wholly dysfunctional as a form of self-protection. Researchers involved with such a study have collectively revealed that changes made to original Okinawan karate, after it arrived on Japan's mainland in the 1920s, had transformed it to the point where it no longer reflected its original functionality.

Where does this leave us? When we embark on a search for accurate knowledge, we discover it can be a quite a challenge.

Too often, when seeking a better understanding of historical, technical, and tactical ambiguities of their original art, I've noticed that many enthusiasts tend to overlook factual knowledge of the cultural landscape and the social mind-set prevalent during the period in which their art evolved.

This oversight, unintentional as it may be, has great consequences for truly understanding how and why our karate "evolved" as it did. We are after all in search of karate success.

We are fortunate that Hermann Bayer's work penetrates deeply into the ambiguity which shrouds our understanding of the most important parts of this art; and he even reveals an almost forgotten path.

Supported by historical and socio-cultural facts, scientific analysis, and public records, Bayer examines how Japan reinterpreted Okinawan karate to best serve its own nationalistic agenda. Moreover, how and why both Japanese and American influences have resulted in creating something quite different from what the original pioneers intended. This fact becomes quite apparent within these pages. Through his collective analyses Bayer

quantifies karate as an industry, and he reveals both a complex and a convoluted evolution, at times aptly illuminating the motivations behind various stake-holders.

As a longtime disciple of the art, and an astute researcher, Hermann Bayer's important contributions and inspirational leadership have not gone unnoticed. Delving into classical tradition, with contemporary insight, he has succeeded in portraying an untold journey that many of us have wondered about for so long.

I am confident that *Analysis of Genuine Karate: Misconceptions, Origins, Development, and True Purpose* will be highly regarded and go on to become mandatory reading for all serious enthusiasts looking to better understand their true history, evolution, and practical application of original karate. It's a fascinating exploration and makes a compelling case for better understanding genuine Okinawan karate.

I am pleased to lend my name to this work and highly recommend it.

Patrick McCarthy, Hanshi 9<sup>th</sup> Dan

Director, International Ryukyu Karate-jutsu Research Society

Naha, Okinawa

## PREFACE

First and foremost I am profoundly thankful to all *sensei*, *senpai*, and fellow students I had the privilege to encounter during many years of studying martial arts. Every one of them made essential contributions to my personal development. In particular, I am deeply honored by the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to have trained with a generation of *hanshi* and *kyoshi* who were directly taught by the senior authorities of the two approaches to karate I have trained in, *Okinawan Kobayashi Shorin Ryu* and *Japanese Shudokan-Doshinkan*.

This training experience is connecting me (better: directly linking me) to a tradition of more than five hundred years of Okinawan *Te*—a fascinating, almost overwhelming, and deeply humbling thought.

Both karate styles share common ancestries since both of their most senior representatives, Chibana Chosin Sensei and Tomaya Kanken Sensei, were practicing *Shuri-Te* under Itosu (“Anko”) Yasutsune Sensei, before *Shudokan-Doshinkan Karatedo* in the years before, during, and after WWII transformed into the non-Okinawan *budo* philosophy of mainland Japan and consequently moved away from the Okinawan *self-protection* philosophy towards *self-perfection* and meditative athletics.

Compared to over five hundred years of *Te* and three hundred years of *Shorin Ryu* in Okinawa, mainland Japanese karatedo, with its more than ninety years of existence, is a relative new development with a different form, purpose, and philosophical superstructure, and it altered traditional Okinawan karate so significantly that it formed a new alternative system and a new approach of its own.

However, (mainland) Japan, the “karate-reproducing” country is—and used to be—the superior political power governing the “karate-inventing” region of Okinawa. Mainland Japan with its own, many centuries-old, martial arts, *samurai*, and *bushido* traditions did not hesitate to claim karate as a *Japanese* martial art, which is of course correct in terms of the governmental sphere, but which is incorrect in terms

of subcultural heritage, and thus is not appropriately crediting the “karate-inventing” region of Okinawa.

Studying traditional, non-sports, (mainland) Japanese karatedo for many years as well as classical Okinawan karate, including its historic and sociologic evolution (in my seventies still being a hard training *deshi*), helped me to understand better. Nevertheless, my insight is limited, and I am in no position to claim that my opinions are as relevant as the ones contributed by any *hanshi*, *kyoshi*, and *renshi* who studied the art for several decades. All my thoughts and conclusions are based on my personal level of knowledge and insight. However, there is a chance that my academic socio-cultural research background and my analytic skills as a scientist—in combination with this current level of understanding—allow a fruitful perspective.

Though preferring the self-protection focus of *dentou* Okinawan karate, I think that there is an opportunity for both karatedo paths to complement each other. Since all karate combines physical, spiritual, and mental development, the initial contradiction may evolve into a new overarching unity—like night and day, *yin* and *yang*—not being mutually exclusive, but defining each other by contrast in order to come together into a new holistic entity. This only happens, however, when both approaches maintain karate’s initial purpose of combat and lethality. Unfortunately this is not always the case; different paths underpin a contrast of “disarmed” Japanese karate-derivatives versus genuine Okinawan karate. Hence, such a synthesis is far from being achieved today and leaves Okinawan karate and Japanese karatedo as two relatively separated entities—unbridged for (sports-) political reasons and hubris rather than for logical or historical ones—which is an unfortunate situation without an easy resolution in sight. To this day the Okinawan karate groups, united in their own *Traditional Okinawan Karate Association*, do not belong to the *Japan Karate Federation*, nor do they intend to join.

Looking at other cultures bears the risk of misconception, especially when considering Asian cultures through a lens forged by Western socialization, Western norms, and Western values. The exploration of socio-cultural phenomena does require more than intellectual understanding; it needs open-minded holistic-hermeneutic avenues with broad perception, empathy, and emotional intelligence, which are all prone to individual limitations. Therefore, though having developed these social skills as a professional coach, and though going to great lengths to be objective in my



arguments and conclusions, I cannot completely exclude bias, and I do apologize in advance for any misunderstanding or misinterpretation.

In this publication I follow the Japanese tradition of writing the first name after a last name for all Japanese individuals referred to. Honorary titles are not used; contrary to Western practice this is not appropriate in Japanese tradition. “In Japan this is considered to be in particularly poor taste as titles such as *hanshi*, *kyoshi*, and so forth are only usually listed with the first appearance of a name in, for example, a faculty list.”<sup>1</sup>

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1. The author is deeply grateful to David Chambers, author and publisher of *Classical Fighting Arts* magazine and *OPG Okinawa Goodwill Ambassador*, for this and other valuable advice; to Miguel Da Luz, who is in charge of Public Relations at the Okinawa Karate Information Center (OKIC), for his support; to Noel Smith, Sensei, 8<sup>th</sup> Dan *Shorin Ryu*, *Shorinkan*, a senior US-*Shorinkan* authority in direct lineage to Nakazato Shugoro Sensei, for training and sharing wisdom, experience and insight; to David Colaizzi, Sensei, 7<sup>th</sup> Dan *Shorin Ryu*, *Shorinkan*, for relentlessly forging my performance every week in conjunction with Sensei Smith, and to Michael Clarke, Sensei, 8<sup>th</sup> Dan *Goju Ryu*, *Jundokan*, Australian karateka and author, for his encouragement to continue my research and to publish my findings.



## Chapter 1

# Okinawan Karate's "Japanization," "Americanization," and "Commercialization"

## Okinawa Is the Birthplace of Karate

Many martial arts historians agree that karate is an indigenous Okinawan martial art form, though written records about its origin do not exist due to centuries-long secrecy and destruction, specifically that caused by the Battle of Okinawa in 1945.

Consequently, the majority of historic karate arguments is based on secondary sources and on what historians call "oral history," that is, on interviews or conversations with karate authorities and other contemporary witnesses. Hence, all published historical claims should be carefully double-checked and should generally be taken with a pinch of salt.

On the other hand, the selection of reliable references for historical and socio-cultural arguments is of utmost importance, because—plausible from a cultural point of view, but unfortunate from the standpoint of precision—all martial arts history is prone to legends and myths, to misinterpretations, to wishful thinking, and even to personal and political agendas.

\* \* \*

A prominent example is *taekwondo*, which, after 1945, positioned itself as an ancient native Korean art, though academic research makes a strong case that it developed out of Japanese karate during the decades of Japan colonializing Southeast Asia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> Korea, of course, like every other Asian country, has its ancient martial arts roots. *Taekwondo* itself, though, was most certainly molded by Choi Hong Hi Sensei, who studied *Shotokan* karate in Japan. After enforced enlistment in the Japanese army, he became involved in the Korean independence movement, which led to his imprisonment. Until his liberation at the end of WWII, he practiced and developed his martial art, and later led the effort to forge Korean martial arts into its “official” form for the instruction of the Korean military and civilians (Thomas/Hornsey 2008).

But surprisingly, “the tales of taekwondo’s ‘ancient’ roots have been repeated so many times and for so many years that these accounts have actually become ‘history’ for a large number of worldwide taekwondo practitioners and followers. Under scrutiny, however, taekwondo history and tradition, as presented by the taekwondo establishment, comes perilously close to being little more than fiction” (Moenig/Minho 2016, p. 158).

This background, of course, detracts neither from *taekwondo*’s specific role as a martial art, nor from its undoubted strengths as a fighting approach, nor from its importance as an Olympic sport. It simply serves as an example of unnecessarily emphasizing a myth over historic facts.

\* \* \*

When historic facts and documents are not available, which is the case with *Te* and karate, scientific research of secondary sources, oral history, and indirect witnesses’ interpretations, for a start, yield a source-criticized collection of historic possibilities. To overcome the eclecticism of the notion that “everything may be possible and everything is equally

---

1. “. . . Taekwondo’s historical claims have been universally questioned, but still, the tales of taekwondo’s indigenous origins from Korea persist. The narratives have been propagated by the taekwondo establishment and popular culture as taekwondo’s tradition for such a long time that it is difficult to correct the storyline. Moreover, Korea’s sensitive political relationship with Japan, which is tied to historical and territorial disputes, nationalistic sentiments, and national pride, makes it almost impossible for the Korean taekwondo community to change the narrative and finally acknowledge taekwondo’s roots in Japanese karate.” (Moenig/Minho 2016, p. 157f).

important," and to move towards historical reasoning, the findings need to not just be stated, but to be *understood* through a "hermeneutic" lens. In other words, to make sense, the findings need to be interpreted within the context of the socio-economic conditions at that time. This is the approach we use here; "hermeneutic" in historic research has the same effect as "empathy" in psychology: it allows us to better understand.

In terms of Okinawan karate, "the earliest known records were from the 18th-century, and they tended to be vague and prone to misinterpretation. Therefore, the generally accepted theory was that there had long been an indigenous fighting method in Okinawa called *Ti* (hand)" (Chambers et. al. 2020, p. xiii), "*peculiar to Okinawa in its origins*" (Funakoshi 1973, p. 3).

"*Te*," or "*Ti*" (手 pronounced "tee"), meaning "hand," apparently developed more than five hundred years ago, some say more than 1000 years ago (ibid., p. 3), and it is supposed that it was initially cultivated, practiced, and promoted by the islands' royal government organization *hiki* under *King Sho Shin* (Quast 2015a, p. 1), before Japan's *Satsuma* nobility invaded and occupied the Ryukyu Islands' kingdoms.

The century that followed this invasion by the Japanese *Satsuma daimyo* (feudal vassals of Japan's *shogun*, or the military commander) in 1609 fertilized the soil for the blossoming of Okinawan martial arts within the Ryukyus' gentry and honed *Te* further as a unique and genuine Okinawan way of fighting, and as a predecessor of karate (Funakoshi 1973, p. 7f; Hokama 2000, p. 15; Nagamine 1976, p. 21; OKIC, n.d., n.p.), whereas some Western sensei and authors claim that karate was initially developed out of Chinese *ch'üan fa*; such as Mark Bishop in the USA (Bishop 1991), or Werner Lind in Germany (Lind 1991), and, more recently, in Europe/Sweden, Jesse Encamp (<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLnepTzrhzuB-6k93Klo0L5GDwiMym3Y9a>).

Though Chinese martial arts were undoubtedly included in *Te*,<sup>2</sup> *validated historic sources about its first seminal impact are missing*. It is rather believed that Okinawan martial arts experts versed in Chinese boxing "altered the existing martial art, called Okinawan-*Te*, weeding out its bad points and adding good points to it, thus working it into an elegant art" (Funakoshi 1973, p. 3).

---

2. Perhaps after the famous "thirty-six Chinese families" took up residence in Okinawa in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century to spread administrative skills, crafts, and arts (Quast 2016); perhaps because Okinawan nobility as well as Okinawan karate masters used to study in China too; or perhaps because Chinese sailors, guards, or military envoys taught the art to Okinawans.

Accordingly, our core argument is that *an existing Okinawan martial art, with its clear intention and purpose of self-protection and preservation of one's life, integrated foreign knowledge and skills as an improvement into its existing system and intellectual framework*. Our thought seems plausible, as *every Asian country or kingdom has its genuine ancient martial art*. This was a simple necessity to survive, because as long as tradition goes, records, memories, myths, and legends describe fights, battles, wars, violent crime, and combat as a constant throughout history. As one of these genuine ancient martial arts forms we find *Te* on the Ryukyu Islands, genuine as it can be. Chinese martial arts were later integrated into *Te* as improvements without sacrificing Okinawan karate's essence, i.e., its true purpose and intention of self-protection.

*Te/Ti*, as a native Okinawan martial art, flourished for several hundred years, with *Naihanchi kata*<sup>3</sup> as one of its original Okinawan forms. Before Itosu Yasutsune Sensei created the *Pinan* [平安] kata series in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Naihanchi* was the first form taught to karateka, characterized by Okinawan karate's anchored stances and positions, controlled minimal hip torque, and hard-style short movements. The lethal concepts in this ancient form allow, in Chibana Chosin Sensei's words, "one technique, total destruction" (Chibana 2006, p. 20).

The purpose of this Okinawan fighting art, developed and practiced in complete privacy, some say secretly, was a simple one; after swords were confiscated and, during the Ryukyu Islands' centuries-long occupation by Japan, when carrying/owning weapons was forbidden,<sup>4</sup> the purpose became to *defend yourself and create the most possible damage to an opponent in the most effective way*. Hence, Okinawan *kara-Te* (term explanation below) was intended to be a weaponless lethal fighting art (however, see excursion below for "weapons in empty-hand *Te* as extensions of the body"), protecting Okinawa's inhabitants in potentially life-threatening situations, because "in an individual confrontation,

3. Since it is not a Japanese word, there are no *kanji* for *Naihanchi*; it usually is written in *katakana* as ナイハンチ. More remarks on this kata, considered to be "the heart and soul of *Shorin Ryu* karate," in Chapter III.

4. "Contrary to popular belief, Karate was never 'banned' in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century by the Okinawan authorities, as has been reported. Instead it was practiced in private so as not to reveal too much of the art to outsiders. The concept of Karate being an illegal practice came from the mistranslation of a written character in Gichin Funakoshi's book, *Karate-Do: My Way of Life*" (CFA, Issue# 58, p. 11). It is claimed that until the official recognition of Okinawa as part of Japan in 1875, karate was practiced not just privately, but "in the strictest secrecy" (Nagamine 1976, p. 24).

### **Noel Smith Sensei, 8<sup>th</sup> Dan Shorin Ryu, Shorinkan**



One example of a traditional, humble, and caring sensei in the USA—known today mostly or only to insiders—is the author's sensei, Noel Smith. He was trained by Nakazato Shugoro Sensei in Okinawa when deployed during the Vietnam War, living on the island for another year, and then visiting annually for training. When in Okinawa, Sensei Smith trained five to six hours per day, six days per week, during the daytime and in the evenings. His daily sixty-to-ninety minute "lunch-time" trainings allowed many one-on-one sessions with the master, who then would share *bunkai* and deeper aspects of concepts.

Sensei Smith is one of the so-called "Original Seven" black belts, directly trained by Nakazato Sensei and sent to the USA to spread *Shorin Ryu Shorinkan*. He devoted his life to maintaining, teaching, and to promoting *Kobayashi Shorin Ryu* in its initial form and purpose as it was taught to him in Okinawa. His dojo, opened 1968, was, and still is, an equivalent to an Okinawan *machi* dojo.

Sensei Smith on the one hand teaches *dentou Shorin Ryu* karate as, in his words, "it was intended to be," lethal and traditional. He has trained members of the Navy Seals and of the Virginia Beach Police's SWAT Team. On the other hand, he developed competition strategies based on this Okinawan style by adjusting controlled traditional techniques and concepts to specific tournament requirements. From 1973 to 1978, he served as head coach for the U.S. karate team, competing internationally, including in the world championships of 1975 in California and of 1977 in Tokyo.

His dedication, contributions, and successes were recognized in 1976 when he won the "Distinguished Service Award—Man of the Year" and was inducted into the USA Karate Hall of Fame. His way of approaching the art sets an example of how to combine—not to be confused with "to integrate"—*dentou* Okinawan karate with sports karate.

Today, in his upper seventies, though exposure to Agent Orange in the Vietnam War has taken a toll on his health, Sensei Smith still teaches his traditional, no-nonsense approach at his dojo and at training camps. He maintains his humble demeanor and the caring

Okinawan way of treating others, which formed him deeply during his time training and living on the island.

He never aggressively promoted or marketed his remarkable achievements and contributions to the art like many others did, who were conforming to the American commercial approach that involves forging an individual brand and creating a business. Hence, today, at training camps, some karate students do not know Sensei Smith and cannot therefore profit from his knowledge—a situation prone to be changed in 2020, when he, for the first time, started to teach and to share his knowledge online.

However, it was fascinating for the author to realize Sensei Smith's recognition in Okinawa during a training trip to the Shorin Ryu Shorinkan Honbu Dojo in 2019. Okinawans who encountered him in the past—former fellow students, now *hanshi* and *kyoshi* themselves, as well as sensei from other Okinawan dojos—were excited to meet him again. He will not be forgotten in Okinawa, and his contributions to the art will be conserved in the USA as well.

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Photograph Noel Smith; cropped by the author



## Chapter 2

# Arguments to Maintain Okinawan Karate In Its Originality

## Traditional Karate Is Okinawan Cultural Heritage

Throughout history, *cultural identity*<sup>1</sup> is affected, damaged, sometimes even destroyed by occupations, takeovers, annexations, and other means of oppression—often combined with feelings of superiority on the occupying force’s side and such of inferiority in the occupied territory. This is because occupied territories lost battles and they definitely are powerless and at the occupier’s mercy. Occupied territories are often exploited economically, and the occupying power usually imposes its culture on the conquered. This inferior and powerless position frequently leads to high sensibility<sup>2</sup> in an occupied territory about aspects of its own cultural heritage.

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1. “Cultural identity can be understood as the experience, enactment, and negotiation of dynamic social identifications by group members within particular settings” (Chen/Lin 2016, p. 1). Or, in plain English, cultural identity is the feeling of belonging to a group and becomes a part of a person’s self-conception and self-perception.

2. Cultural identity may be seen as a part of “social identity,” where members of a subculture can “experience social identity threat when they think that their group is not sufficiently acknowledged as a separate entity with unique characteristics. Such group-distinctiveness threat is experienced when different groups of people are included in larger, more inclusive groups, nations, or organizations” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-identity-theory/Identity-threat>, retrieved February 2, 2020).

We find this challenge in Okinawan history, where—within less than two centuries—the island was obtained and annexed by Japan, had its inhabitants assimilated and educated to become Japanese, was abandoned by the Japanese military in WWII, its population killed in battle in 1945, was then occupied by the United States for twenty-seven years, and was finally handed back to Japan.

### **Okinawa Maintains Its Subcultural Identity within Japan's Culture**

Okinawa became part of Japan politically, but at the same time, culturally it was not, leaving a dichotomy of culture and citizenship. The process of Okinawa's assimilation into Japan's culture and political system is a complicated and unique one.

Okinawa was Japan's only new territory that was granted the status of prefecture in 1879. After a lengthy political process, Okinawans eventually received full legal citizenship in 1920, two years before Funakoshi Gichin Sensei introduced karate into mainland Japan. "This differentiates Okinawa from other occupied regions, e.g., Taiwan and Korea, which were colonies par excellence. They were never incorporated into the administrative system and social network of the Japanese state to the same extent as Okinawa" (Meyer 2007, p. 95).

The more recent history of the Pacific War molded another aspect of Okinawa's complex political experience. "In the spring of 1945 on the eve of the Battle of Okinawa, the Japanese . . . lawfully surrendered to the United States. Although the end of the war was reached, the emperor of Japan along with the military insisted on pressing on in an attempt to put off the inevitable occupation just a little longer" (Nielson 2006, p. 5). During the following battle an estimated one fourth of Okinawan civilians died.

After Japan's capitulation, Okinawa was governed under U.S. military rule. Restoration followed in 1972, and the island was given back to Japan. Okinawa Prefecture was reestablished and its current prefectural flag was adopted.

On the one hand, the experience of the battle with the USA led to initial resentments against Americans. On the other hand, suffering from being treated as inferior for decades as well as inhumane acts of Japanese soldiers during the battle of Okinawa<sup>3</sup> maintained some

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3. "Unlike the Americans who were immediately perceived as the enemy and rightfully feared by Okinawans, the Japanese were to be the protectors of the civilians. Instead of shielding their

cultural boundary between Okinawa and Japan. This two-sided, bi-directional sentiment, aimed at the initial occupational force, Japan, as well as at the new one, America, prepared the re-enforcement of genuine Okinawan cultural symbols as well as peace-related values as important postwar and post-reversion aspects of Okinawan culture.

A witness at that time, Sam Athye Sensei, 7<sup>th</sup> Dan *Shorin Ryu*, *Shorinkan*, describes the general situation in Okinawa and his karate training experience in 1973, as<sup>4</sup>

“... still suffering from an economic depression converting from dollars to yen, changing from the right side of the road to the left. There were still open sewers, few street lights, and no *gaigene* (karate tourists) wandering *kokusaidori* . . . I took day classes from Hanshi Yuchuko Higa. Night classes from Master Katsuya Miyahira.<sup>5</sup> I remember the class was filled (20+ old yudansha) [*sic*]; these guys had survived the war and the famine. We would do kata for fifteen minutes and a five minute smoke break you would follow [*sic*]. Half of Miyahira’s dojo was open air. In both dojos, the younger guys my age would want to bang forearms, do ippon kumite, and ask me to do kata as a way to check me out. There were no military or *gaijin* at these dojos. They did not like white guys and were open about it.”

The resentment toward foreigners soon changed, and over time Western karate tourists as well as U.S. service members were heartily welcomed in Okinawa and in Okinawan dojos.

Today, Okinawan hospitality toward American guests and caring for them is unmatched, and it is an extremely rare occasion—which the author himself experienced only once—that a fellow karateka shows some kind of resentment towards a *gaijin*, toward a non-Japanese outsider.

Until today, the Okinawans have not 100-percent assimilated into Japanese society. A boundary remains, and the dichotomy of culture and citizenship endures. Nothing indicates that it will disappear in the future.

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brethren in battle from the common foe, they became the enemy while practicing horrific acts of violence and grand schemes of deceit against them. Japanese soldiers were commonly known to command Okinawan civilians to commit group suicide rather than surrender to the enemy. Okinawans who had found refuge from the battle by hiding in caves were killed by Japanese soldiers in order to use the shelters for themselves” (Nielson 2006, p. 6).

4. (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ShorinryuShorinkanGroup/?fref=nf>). Sensei Sam Athye’s reference to a *dojo* being “half open air” underlines the challenging training conditions in Okinawa’s extremely hot and muggy climate for Americans accustomed to air conditioning.

5. Author’s remark: both sensei trained under Chibana Chosin Sensei and are famous for their hard style fighting techniques, which were continuously used and practiced during *kumite* and sparring training sessions at that time.

Outwardly, the two societies are integrated, but the Okinawan people have proven masterful at the remaining cultural differences and attaching new importance to them (Meyer 2007, p. 316), genuine Okinawan karate being one of those cultural symbols.

Japan's commendable strategy of not destroying Okinawan traditions during centuries of occupation and control created favorable conditions for the reemergence of a culture that today represents the whole of Okinawa. We find this local culture for instance in the performing arts, in traditional rituals, and in celebrations: the music of *sanshin*, turtleback tombs, *shiisaa* [shisa] lions, the *shiimii* festival and other cultural constructs appropriated by the present-day narratives of Okinawan identity, were preserved against the expansion of Japanese culture" (Meyer 2007, p. 311).

"By debating and transforming Okinawan politics and values, and by creating a vibrant Okinawan music and literary scene, Okinawans are embroidering an intricate tapestry of Okinawanness. What it means to be Okinawan is being contested, redefined, and inscribed in the consciousness and praxis of Okinawa today" (Hein/Selden 2003, p. 1).

The island's culture and its implicit values are embodied in the peaceful, caring, easygoing personalities of the locals and their spirit of *yumaru* (i.e., helping one another).

Shisa lions are found all over Okinawa today, like the ones guarding the Shuri Castle entrance, as well as new modifications like the ones wearing *gi* and guarding the entrance of the famous *Shureido* karate gear store in the city of Naha in Okinawa.

Okinawan karate, however, unlike these tangible and other intangible symbols of Okinawan subcultural identity, was never "left alone" by Japan. On the contrary, Okinawan karate had to deal with several Japanese "takeover" attempts.

The fact that Okinawa is a prefecture of its former occupiers, and that mainland Japan is preserving its own, many centuries-old *bushido* and *budo* traditions, complicates things, because "while some maintain the autonomy and cultural rooting of karate as an indigenous art of Okinawa, those in the Japanese government view karate as a Japanese cultural tradition, as is consistent with their view of Okinawa as part of Japan both legally and culturally" (Johnson 2012, p. 62).

Image 5: Shisa Figures at Shuri Castle Gate



Image 6: Shisa Figures at Shureido Karate Gear Store Entrance



### Okinawa Officially Promotes Karate as Its Cultural Heritage

Especially over the last two decades we find an ever increasing number of actions and strategies—with considerable involvement of the Okinawan Prefectural Government—proving that Okinawans *officially* consider karate as a major part of the island's cherished *cultural heritage*.<sup>6</sup>

- 1997: The Okinawa Prefecture declares *karate* and *kobudo* as Intangible Cultural Assets (<http://okic.okinawa/en/local-network>) and acclaims the first three famous and then still-active karate masters as Intangible Culture Assets Holders (see table below).
- 2005: The Okinawa Prefecture Assembly introduces October 25th as the “Day of Karate,” which has been celebrated every year since. This is a day where thousands of karateka, inhabitants of the islands representing their Okinawan styles and dojos, often joined by their international karate guests, perform kata on Kokusaidori, which is Naha's main street. This impressive mass performance is complemented and highlighted by Okinawan masters demonstrating style-typical kata.
- 2008: Okinawa Dento Karatedo Shinkokai is established as the new umbrella organization for all traditional Okinawan karate and *kobudo* styles (<http://www.odks.jp/en/>).
- 2011: The Okinawa Traditional Karate Liaison Bureau (OTKLB) starts as a private project, funded by the Okinawan Prefectural Government as an “Okinawa Prefecture Culture and Arts Promotion–Industry Creation Support Project” (<http://okkb.org/>).<sup>7</sup>
- 2016: The Okinawa Governor announces the creation of the Karate Promotion Division within the Culture, Tourism and Sport Department

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6. Cultural heritage is defined as an expression of the ways of living developed centuries ago, in this case on the Ryukyu Islands, and passed on from generation to generation (<https://en.unesco.org/>). As defined by UNESCO, it encompasses the two main categories: *tangible* and *intangible* cultural heritage. Karatedo falls into the second one:

- *Tangible cultural heritage* is everything in “movable” form, like paintings, sculptures, coins, manuscripts, as well as “immovable” form, like monuments, archaeological sites, underwater wrecks, and ruins.
- *Intangible cultural heritage* is oral traditions, the performing arts, and rituals.

7. Miguel Da Luz initiated and nurtured the OTKLB project. For many years he was a distinguished publisher and public relations representative of Okinawan karate, promoting Okinawan karate worldwide, and is now serving at the Okinawa Karate Information Center (OKIC).

Image 7: Days of Karate in Naha, Okinawa 2019: Okinawan Masters after Demonstrating Kata at the Karate Kaikan on Oct 24



Photographs by Vinh Dinh

of the Okinawan Prefectural Government (<http://okic.okinawa/en/local-network>).

- 2016 The Okinawa prefecture creates the Okinawa Karate and Kobujutsu Preservation Society for designated intangible cultural assets.
- 2017 Opening of the Okinawa Karate Kaikan, a beautiful training hall and information center of Okinawan karate (see below) with its role

stated to be to “preserve, inherit, and develop Okinawan karate as a unique culture whilst telling people both in and outside Japan that ‘Okinawa is the birthplace of karate,’ and to be a facility that can be used as a place to learn the essence of karate” (<http://karatekaikan.jp/en/>).

- 2017 The Okinawan prefectural government establishes the Okinawa Karate Information Center (OKIC) to handle inquiries regarding karate and training requests for Okinawa as well as to promote Okinawa karate and *kobudo*. Supervised by the Okinawa Prefecture Government, the center is managed by Okinawa Dento Karatedo Shinkokai (<http://okic.okinawa/en/>).
- 1995–2018 Hosting international tournaments for Okinawan karate and *kobudo* independent from tournaments conducted by the Japan Karate Foundation JKF or the World Karate Foundation WKF (<https://okinawa-karate.okinawa/en/history/>):
  - 1995: Okinawa Karatedo and Kobudo World Pre-Tournament (on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the pacific war and the Battle of Okinawa); three hundred participants
  - 1997: Okinawa Karatedo and Kobudo World Tournament (commemoration of the completion of the Okinawa Prefectural Budokan); 810 participants
  - 2003: Okinawa Karatedo and Kobudo World Tournament; 380 participants
  - 2009 Okinawa Traditional Karatedo World Tournament (commemoration of the establishment of the Okinawa Dentou Karatedo Shinkokai); 646 participants.
- 2018 The first Okinawa Karate International Tournament with 4,087 participants<sup>8</sup> from fifty countries and with the stated purpose of “preserving and passing down correctly Okinawan Karate’s skills and spirituality nurtured and systematized by its pioneers . . . with the aim of promoting traditional Okinawan karate and kobudo” (<https://okinawa-karate.okinawa/en/schedule/>).

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8. Calculated by the author using official statistics in the tournament’s report pp. 90–93, ([https://okinawa-karate.okinawa/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/THE-1st-OKINAWA-KARATE-INTERNATIONAL-TOURNAMENT\\_Report.pdf](https://okinawa-karate.okinawa/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/THE-1st-OKINAWA-KARATE-INTERNATIONAL-TOURNAMENT_Report.pdf)).

The Governor’s message on the report’s opening page names ‘3,200 man-days’ and 50 participating countries and regions [‘man-day’ is a unit of measurement, used especially in accounting and management, based on a standard number of man-hours in a day of work]. Miguel Da Luz at OKIC provided the link to the official report to the author by email on February 5, 2020.



### Chapter 3

# Empirical Evidence and the Laws of Physics to Support the Sociocultural and Historic Arguments

This chapter provides empirical evidence for the socio-cultural and historic argumentation of Chapters I and II, illustrated by three examples<sup>1</sup> that are all taken from the author's training experience.

The first practical example compares a “disarmed,” traditional, non-sports, and “form-only” Japanese karate variation, *Doshinkan Karatedo*, with a genuine classic Okinawan one, *Kobayashi Ryu*. Having trained with *hanshi* and *kyoshi* who were directly instructed by the originators of the two styles<sup>2</sup> increases the chance of identifying authentic forms and practices in both karate paths. This suggests the experienced

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1. The three examples are partly based on earlier research papers by the author (Bayer, 2019a; 2019b; 2020).

2. (footnote continued on the following page) The author's first *Doshinkan Karatedo* sensei in Europe, Ichikawa Isao, Sensei, 10th Dan, *Shudokan*, started *Shudokan* training as Toyama Kanken Sensei's *uchi-deshi* in Japan in the 1940s. Soon after Tomaya Sensei's death in the late 1960s, Ichikawa Isao Sensei went to Europe and named his system in the *Shudokan* tradition *Doshinkan*, with its *bonbu* dojo in Vienna, Austria. After his passing in 1996, his brother Ichikawa Nobuo, Sensei, 10th Dan, *Doshinkan*, became the new leader of the organization until he himself passed away in 2019. He was the author's second senior *Doshinkan Karatedo* sensei in Europe and in the USA.

differences as general representations of some core differences between Okinawan and Japanese karate.

Though the author trains *Kobayashi Ryu* as taught in *Shorin Ryu Shorinkan*, as a deshi he is neither authorized to speak for this organization in any official or unofficial capacity, nor does he intend to. Accordingly, as a *Doshinkan Karatedo sandan* he neither is in the position to officially or unofficially speak for this organization, nor does he intend to. The author's position is the neutral-analytic one of independent research.

The second and the third practical example illustrate the superiority of the Never Changing Kata Principle by applying physics, mechanics, and scientifically evaluated velocity measurements to kata moves. The specific illustrations used are two kata stances/positions, *Nekoachidachi* (cat stance) and *Naihanchi- (Kiba-) dachi* (straddled legs stance) in their traditional and their modern (altered) peculiarity. The laws of physics analysis of “modern” kata interpretations unveils some serious negative consequences of these modifications, namely *reduced body-weight-power transfer* into a technique in the first example, and a karateka's *increased vulnerability through delayed block-counters and damaging torque on knee joints* in the second one.

## First Practical Example:

### How Training Differences between Genuine Okinawan Karate and “Disarmed” Traditional Japanese Karatedo Lead to Contrasting Fighting Skills

The two different karate styles I use to study and compare here are *Doshinkan Karatedo*, one of the “Japanized” karate versions labeled “disarmed” in Chapter I, as the representation of traditional, non-sports, form-only *Japanese* karate. It was created in Japan by Ichikawa Isao

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The author's *Kobayashi Ryu* sensei in Okinawa is Minoru Nakazato, Sensei, 10<sup>th</sup> Dan *Shorin Ryu, Shorinkan*, who since 2016 has lead *Shorin Ryu Shorinkan*. The author's senior sensei in the USA is Noel Smith, Sensei, 8th Dan *Shorin Ryu, Shorinkan*. Both were trained directly by Nakazato Shugoro Sensei, president of *Shorin Ryu Shorinkan* until his passing 2016.

Sensei Noel Smith is one of the so-called “Original Seven” black belts, sent to the USA by Nakazato Shugoro Sensei in the 1960s to promote *Shorin Ryu Shorinkan* there. These famous Original Seven are the two Okinawans Yamashita Tadashi (initially born in Japan) and Shiroma Jiro, and the five Americans Eddie Bethea, Sid Campbell, Frank Hargrove, Robert (“Bob”) Herten, and Noel Smith (<http://www.obikarateschool.com/lineage/shorinkan/our-lineage/>).

Sensei and established in the early 1960s in Tomaya Kancken Sensei's *Shudokan* tradition.

The second one, classic Okinawan *Kobayashi Shorin Ryu*, developed from the centuries-old teachings of Matsumuro Sokon Sensei and, later, Isotu Anko Sensei. It was specifically honed and labeled by Chosin Chibana Sensei in the 1930s. Later, among others, his student Nakazato Shugoro Sensei spread it worldwide through his *Shorin Ryu Shorinkan* organization.

The characterizing terms we use are a modified version of the distinction introduced by Sensei Bill Hayes (Hayes n.d., Vol. 6, Spring, p. 10):

- “modern” *sport*-oriented karate
- “traditional” form-only self-*perfection* based karate-do
- “classical” form-, principle-, application- based self-*protection* karate-jutsu

Hence, *Doshinkan Karatedo* falls into the second category of “traditional” self-perfection based arts, whereas *Kobayashi Ryu* represents a version of the third category, a “classical” self-protection art.

Training in Okinawan *Kobayashi Ryu* is considerably less standardized or formalized than in Japanese *Doshinkan*; the latter mirrors mainland Japan's *budo* tradition with its militaristic roots and its preference for well-defined rules and narrow regime. This, however, does not mean that in *Shorin Ryu Shorinkan* respect for lineage and for honoring traditions would be less characteristic; it means that this respect and honor is accomplished there by internalized habits rather than through ordered rituals with detailed verbal commands.

In this sense, *Doshinkan Karatedo* is characterized by:

- synchronous moves of the entire training group
- ordered row switches from front to back throughout a training session with a particular protocol and etiquette
- predetermined rank positions at specific places within the training group
- elaborated rituals
- cultivated and upheld symbolism

In terms of symbolism, there is no *Doshinkan Karatedo* training session without the style's flag, showing logo and kanji, being displayed

at *shomen*, or without meticulous opening and closing rituals (see below)—neither indoors in dojos, gyms, or rented rooms; nor, if trainings take place outdoors, in public spaces, as they often do, such as in parks, stadiums, or on beaches.

In addition, at training camps no session will start or end without an extensive and well-structured ceremony of chants and coordinated rhythmic body-conditioning slaps immediately preceding the opening and closing ceremonies. This is the derivative of an ancient Japanese ritual of counted rhythmic hand clapping to show gratitude, appreciation, and consent. The version used in *Doshinkan Karatedo* enhances group spirit and the social bond of a close international community, which may look to an outsider like the residue of a secret society.

The meticulous etiquette in *Doshinkan Karatedo* is only loosened for training attire, even in training camps with senior sensei, which is allowed to be surprisingly casual; T-shirts or tank-tops (or even no top at all) are permitted, whereas in *Shorin Ryu Shorinkan* training camps with senior sensei the standard white karate uniform is worn.

Contrasting *Doshinkan Karatedo*'s rigid (mainland) Japanese etiquette, and representing the more relaxed Okinawan *Te* tradition, there are fewer and shorter rituals in a *Kobayashi Ryu* training group, fewer verbal commands, and more degrees of freedom, relying instead on internalized habits. A *Shorin Ryu* training group does not always stay together as one unit to move synchronously; it may be split up into sub-groups of students at comparable skill levels—sometimes supervised by a black-belt or color-belt *senpai*—where students may work on different assignments.

Rank positions in the training group are not fixed but appointed by the leading sensei; higher ranks may sometimes be requested to be in the front row(s) of the group and at other times in the back row(s), and the leading sensei may position lower color ranks at varying locations within the training group, depending on the intended learning experience for these students.

A *Kobayashi Ryu* kata is not started with the commands “*rei—kamaite*” for bow and following “ready-move,” nor is it closed with “*naore—rei*” for finishing move and following bow, as is *always* the case in *Doshinkan Karatedo*—always, without any exception.

The distinguishable, less-formalized structure in *Shorin Ryu Shorinkan* is further mirrored in considerably different opening and closing rituals and their corresponding commands. Whereas in *Shorin Ryu Shorinkan*

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### **Hermann Bayer, PhD Biography**

Hermann holds degrees in economics, sociology, psychology, and business administration. He worked in German and US universities for eighteen years as a scientist, professor, campus dean, and multi-site dean. For another twelve years Hermann served as the CEO and executive coach of a German coaching and consulting firm. In addition, he had ten successful years of self-employment, another nine years working in the manufacturing industry, and two years serving in the (West) German army's corps of engineers. He immigrated to the USA in 2005.



The author of several books and numerous articles on industrial relations, coaching, and consulting, Hermann now publishes on karate-jutsu's and karate-do's socio-cultural roles and their development.

Hermann started to train and to study the art of karate—including its historical and socio-cultural development—in 1981. His experience covers traditional (non-sports) Japanese *Shudokan-Doshinkan* karate-do as well as classic Okinawan *Shorin Ryu* karate-jutsu. In 2016 he completely changed his life priorities from academics to “full-time-karate.” To broaden his karate development beyond its Japanese form and to better understand today's misconceptions about the art's original orientation toward protecting and preserving life, he restarted from scratch with classic Okinawan *Kobayashi Ryu* karate-jutsu and kobudo. In addition, Hermann studies *suikendo*—meaning “the art of fists flowing like water,” today's most advanced karate fighting system. Over the years, he has spent considerable time with renowned Japanese, Western, and Okinawan karate teachers, all the while researching the core essence of the style they represent.

Today, in his seventies, Hermann is still training hard, practicing karate daily and attends at least three, but mostly four, two-hour empty-hand and kobudo training sessions every week. To make a point about combining (not to be confused with “integrating”) traditional karate-jutsu and sports karate, he successfully competes in martial arts tournaments and secures first place in his age bracket.

*Genuine karate is an Okinawan martial art for self-defense; its principle of “never changing kata” is critical to its effectiveness.*

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The changes made to karate in mainland Japan and in America have altered karate so intrinsically that it can no longer claim to be *genuine* karate.

Practitioners of karate are often confused, misguided, and even led to believe that karate is just karate—this is far from the truth.

Dr. Hermann Bayer, Ph.D., examines how Japan reinterpreted Okinawan karate to create its own unique style of karate-do, and how Japanese and American changes resulted in a modern karate-sport business. Contents include:

- Okinawan karate’s “principle of never changing kata.”
- Karate as part of Okinawa’s cultural heritage.
- Socio-cultural arguments to preserve Okinawan karate—as is.
- Japan—the karate reproducing country.
- Karate or Karate-do?
- The business of karate, karate-do, and karate-sport.
- Scientific study of a peaceful karate mind.
- The laws of physics reveal weaknesses when kata are changed.

This substantially researched work makes a compelling historical and socio-cultural case for conserving Okinawan karate. Supported by historical facts, scientific analysis, and public records, Dr. Bayer reveals the complex evolution of karate and the unsettled claims made upon it by various stakeholders.



**Hermann Bayer, Ph.D.**, holds degrees in economics, sociology, psychology, and business administration. Hermann’s karate training began in 1981. He has spent considerable time with renowned Japanese, Western, and Okinawan karate teachers, all the while researching the core essence of the style they represent. Hermann Bayer resides in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

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