

# Shin Gi Tai

KARATE TRAINING FOR  
BODY, MIND, AND SPIRIT

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Jo Kyu Mu—Follow Your Dream, written by Eiichi Miyazato



# INTRODUCTION

Standing in the doorway of the Kodokan in Kume, Okinawa, the silence of the empty dojo whispered to me. I could hear echoes of training from long ago when students of karate gave themselves fully to the learning of their martial art. And in the ecstasy of sweat they found a harmony of spirit, technique, and the intricate workings of their body. Those who devoted their lives to karate developed an internal ease and an economy of movement that belied the effort of their training. They found a sense of balance between mind, body, and spirit, so natural as to be rendered invisible to the casual observer. To others, karateka possessed almost mystical powers and were capable of superhuman strength. But nothing could be further from the truth, for karate training offers no such abilities. The potential to understand the essence of karate is innate in all of us. It lies dormant waiting to be discovered and is present in each individual who enters a dojo seeking instruction. The way we apply ourselves to the training reveals the reality of that potential. Long before karate became a pastime for children, a professional franchise, or a pathway to celebrity, it held a very different place in the hearts and minds of those who practiced it. In this book I want to explain what karate was intended to be, how the people of Okinawa learned the art, and how, having mastered its deadly techniques, also succeeded in cultivating a calm and peaceful mind.

Entrance to the Kodokan dojo, Kume, Okinawa.



Karate did not originate on the battlefields of old Japan, as did some of the fighting systems that still exist today, albeit in diluted forms, such as *jujutsu*, *kendo*, *naginatado*, and more. As much as anyone has been able to ascertain, karate, as we know it today, is a development of the indigenous fighting ways of Okinawa, simply referred to as ‘*ti*’ (pronounced ‘*tee*’, meaning hand), combined with influences from countries with whom the Okinawans traded. Premier among these was of course China, but we should not forget Okinawa’s other neighbors in the region, countries such as Siam (Burma), Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines, as well as others. All of which, even today, have strong fighting traditions that go back many centuries. It takes no great leap of faith to see how the flow of ideas from one location to another could have transpired. In the pirate infested waters of Southeast Asia, sailors who could not defend themselves were vulnerable to attack, and though I suspect the fighting styles of these men were somewhat less refined than we might imagine when thinking of skilled martial artists, I have no doubt they could handle themselves well and deliver a blow to be reckoned with.

Aside from the sailors and workingmen of the island, the landed gentry of Okinawa also pursued the martial arts. Shuri, the royal capital, has a long and illustrious history of residents who were highly skilled in the use of weapons and fighting with their bare hands. Almost always these men were connected to the royal household in some way for their employment, or held hereditary posts as village leaders. Within the culture of Okinawa, such men of rank<sup>1</sup> were revered in much the same way as the samurai were revered in Japan. They were referred to by the general population as *bushi*, a title bestowed upon those who excelled in both the fighting arts and the ways of scholarship. In truth, some who carried the title did not entirely live up to it by today’s measure; be that as it may, such men were responsible for transmitting much of the fighting arts of Okinawa that exist today, and without them the gene pool of empty hand and weapon arts passed down to modern times would be much smaller. With successive generations of martial artists grew the notion that fighting should be used as a matter of last resort, although it is clear from the surviving literature that this idea was already well established in the Chinese martial arts. Throughout the 1800s, many individuals traveled from Okinawa to China with the specific goal of learning a martial art or improving upon the knowledge they already had. From these travelers, a fresh influx of fighting strategies and philosophical education began to filter into Okinawa’s martial arts community; and as a result, the character building quality of training in ‘*ti*’ (today known as karate) and with weapons (today known as kobudo) began to make its presence felt even more strongly throughout the early decades of the twentieth century.

A glimpse of this evolution in thinking can be found in the March 1934 and January 1936 papers on Okinawan karate written by Chojun Miyagi, both entitled “An Outline of Karate-do” (*Karate-do Gaisetsu*).<sup>2</sup> In them he addressed the possible beginnings of karate in Okinawa and the state of the art at the time of writing. He touched on the subject of styles, the characteristics of karate, and the methods of training. Also, he hypothesized on the future of karate as it began its unsteady expansion outward from Okinawa to



the rest of the world. In his book, *Tales of Okinawa's Great Masters*, Shoshin Nagamine<sup>3</sup> wrote: "When Higaonna, Miyagi's teacher, taught 'to te' jutsu, he was always known to cite passages from the ancient book of Chinese martial arts called the *Wubeizhi*, a document perhaps better known by its Japanese pronunciation, *Bubishi*. Underscoring the eight principles of *chuan fa*<sup>4</sup> and the strategy of Sun-Tzu,<sup>5</sup> Kanryo Higaonna maintained that physical training without moral philosophy was not 'to te'." That Higaonna, an illiterate trader and sometimes drunkard,<sup>6</sup> was nevertheless stressing the importance of moral philosophy as far back as the early years of the twentieth century indicates that long before karate was known outside Okinawa, it had already obtained a mantle of character development, moving karate beyond the realms of mere physical self-protection. Indeed, over two centuries earlier, in 1683, the noted Okinawan fighting master 'Ti' Junsoku (1663–1734) offered the following advice regarding the underlying nature of training in the martial arts of Okinawa:

"No matter how you may excel in the art of *ti* and in your scholastic endeavors, nothing is more important than your humanity as observed in daily life."

The behavior of men like Kanryo Higaonna may fall short of the bar by today's standards, but it would be wrong to take him out of his historical milieu and judge him by our present day understanding of what is and isn't considered decent behavior. If we today can live with a variety of political leaders around the world who have, on record, cheated on their wives and families, taken bribes, fixed elections, and smoked cannabis—without inhaling of course—and still allow them to remain in office to decide the fate of humanity, then I see no reason why we should condemn those who lived less public lives in a time when their behavior was considered more acceptable.

Throughout this book, I have drawn primarily on my own experiences on Okinawa to show the value of practicing karate in the traditional Okinawan way. I have included accounts from Okinawan karate masters, both past and present, as well as stories and anecdotes from my time



"Ti" Junsoku (1663–1734)

training in Japanese karate. In doing so, I tried to avoid accounts that, for me at least, have taken a few too many steps away from the reality that I am comfortable with. Such tales I will leave for others to tell. What I want to do here is remain as close to authenticity as possible. To that end, I have revisited the writings of Okinawa's great karate masters of the past and added my own observations on the present state of karate. It should be clearly understood from the outset that I am not suggesting parity in stature or importance between these teachers of the past and myself. I recognize my karate has been built upon the shoulders of the giants who came before me, people who in many cases had died before I was even born. Their thoughts, actions, and how they lived their lives have allowed me to gain access to training methods and ways of thinking that have long since fallen out of fashion, and these I want to share here. For without this education, I have no doubt my own understanding of karate would now stand upon much shallower foundations.

There has always been a sense of contradiction in traditional karate training: an obvious paradox. On the one hand, the schooling is extremely physical and sometimes even severe; on the other hand, those who persevere and endure such training for more than ten years develop a peaceful and cooperative nature. They appear gentle on the outside yet remain strong on the inside, but how does this happen? What is it about learning how to fight that opens the door to pacifism? In this book I will explore both the physical and the mental education that takes place in a traditional karate dojo, whether in Okinawa, Japan, or a dojo found in any other country. Such a place is where the "way" of karate takes precedence over profit and where the activities taking place should not be mistaken for the pastime being pursued in the commercial karate clubs found the world over. Both approaches to karate, traditional and commercial, are looked at in chapter two. While finding a commercial club these days is as simple as picking up the phone book, finding a traditional karate dojo is a little more difficult. Even when a dojo is discovered, access can prove to be easier said than done; you cannot simply walk in off the street and request instruction, for it has always been the prerogative of the teacher to pick the student, and in a traditional karate dojo this is still the case today. Karate was introduced to the West by the Japanese, and their language is now used around the world when discussing its techniques and even its philosophy. Because of this, where required, I have placed Japanese words in parenthesis to ease the flow of information; any errors are mine and mine alone. That said, the essence of the philosophical lessons you are about to encounter stems as much from Chinese and Okinawan thinking as Japanese. They have been mirrored in many different cultures throughout the ages. Therefore, it would be quite wrong to attribute too much credit for the underlying philosophy of karate to any one society alone.

I do not believe much progress can be made in karate without first developing a sense of balance, but the balance I speak of has less to do with standing upright and more to do with your overall approach to training and indeed, life. Karate insists you cultivate your body through your mind, and because of this you are obliged to fight your ego on

two separate fronts, the cerebral and the physical. On the dojo floor, the mental and physical aspects of learning karate are regularly daunting and this alone causes many to stop training. Yet if you can endure the early years, the first decade, then there is an opportunity for real and lasting benefit. Once again, the term “balance” is pertinent here, for along with the physical doggedness needed to practice karate seriously over many years comes the mental tenacity necessary to open the mind to *tsu shin gen*: the piercing eye of insight. When the mind and body are healthy and in harmony, your true spirit emerges, and within this book you will find both physical training methods and psychological challenges. Karate is like everything else in life; the things you like, and those you don't, need to be reflected upon before you reach an understanding of them. It is essential not to offset the scales of reason with your own narrow-mindedness. Intolerance is not a character trait found in those who study karate seriously.

The expression *shin gi tai* has a literal translation: mind–technique–body. Additionally, the term has philosophical connotations that run much deeper and clearly point to a particular kind of concord in those who seek to gain an understanding of karate beyond the realms of mere kicking and punching. Although some may consider such an ambition to be fanciful, I would disagree; for regardless of how many people you learn to defeat in combat, the deeper aim of karate training since times long ago has always been to conquer your own ego, and by doing so, you increase the likelihood of avoiding conflict. When you can do that, you have an opportunity to establish a sense of balance in life, which is denied those who take as a measure of progress their increased ability to harm another. Such a benchmark may appeal to individuals who fear to face themselves in the dojo, but to a serious karateka, inflicting physical damage on others is always the last resort. Be that as it may, the use of force is an option that, if things should turn physical, allows a karateka to unleash an arsenal of techniques capable of producing severe injury, even death. As this is the reality of years spent training seriously in karate, it becomes clear why a person's mind (*Shin*) must be developed ahead of his technique (*Gi*) if he is to discover a sense of balance within his body (*Tai*). This is the essence, the spirit, of *Shin Gi Tai*. The way we learn karate is sometimes referred to as “do” (pronounced doe) meaning a path or road, and all those who choose to walk this path do so with the understanding that the way ahead will most certainly be a difficult one.

A word or two is also necessary to define the phrase “traditional karate” and what differentiates it from any other type of karate. While it is certainly true that karate as we see it today appeared relatively recently, the use of the word “traditional,” for me at least, has always pointed to the role karate plays in my life, rather than the techniques learned or the kata practiced. The physical aspects of karate are the least of it; they provide only an opportunity to experience the essence of karate through training and, as Nagamine sensei put it, “the ecstasy of sweat.” That so much is made these days of how things are done within a particular school of karate has taken the focus away from the individual striving to go deeply and, instead, placed it firmly upon the masses and their scramble to emulate their teacher. While the latter may provide the better business model, the former



Kenkyukai kumite training, ca. 1928. The Kenkyukai dojo was an attempt to stop the spread of “styles” within karate.

still remains the only way to reach an understanding of yourself through the practice of karate. This to me is the tradition of karate, the way of karate—that I might discover through my own efforts strategies to live well and protect myself from adversity. It is, I believe, the same things others have striven for when they walked the earth and breathed the air, when they wiped the sweat from their face and took a deep breath, ready to go just one more time. Many years may have passed between them and me, but karate has endured. Long after you and I have gone, karate will live in individuals who have managed to avoid the distractions of their day and discovered what others found. This is the tradition I speak of when I use the word. The philosophy and the physical techniques of karate in this book do not represent the entire repertoire of either. There is much more to be found in the study of karatedo—the way of the empty hand—than any book can deliver. Indeed, even with daily training, I am not sure it is possible to master every karate technique or come to terms with every philosophical signpost we encounter; for as many a karate master will tell you, with karate one lifetime is not enough! That said, the information contained within this book should cause you to pause for a moment and consider your own situation. And in that reflection perhaps you will reaffirm, or possibly discover for the first time, your individual sense of direction within karate.

This book touches upon subjects many teachers of karate today are either unaware of or choose to avoid, but I am placing them back in the spotlight deliberately. Karate, as a martial art, is in danger of becoming homogenized, changed beyond recognition due to sporting and commercial concerns rendering it all but useless as a means of personal self-protection. Indeed, there are many voices within the martial arts community today only too willing to proclaim that karate’s combat credentials have been lost already: but they are wrong! Karate techniques delivered correctly and with the appropriate mindset, continue to have the potency to maim or kill; what has changed over the past few decades is not karate, but the attitude of the majority who practice it. The original intention of karate has been hijacked by people who place form ahead of function. This book is not

concerned with the ‘look’ of karate, or karate as a sporting or a business venture. What ‘style’ of karate you practice is irrelevant; the important thing to appreciate with karate is ‘why’ you practice; what do you expect the end result of all your efforts to be, and are those efforts being reflected in the quality of your life outside the dojo? The subject matter being presented here is for adults only and goes beyond the unchecked belligerence of the adolescent mind. In parts, you may feel offended by what you read, but hopefully not too much; I have not set out to offend anyone deliberately. As it has done for me and many others, traditional karate training has the capacity to change lives for the better, but only if you are prepared to move past the obvious. If you are prepared to swim in deeper waters than the shallows most people splash around in, you will discover more about yourself than you can imagine. Yet *budo* is a concept more often spoken of than put into practice, so you will need to gather all your courage and tenacity, and all your integrity, too, if you hope to walk the ‘middle-path’ of *budo*; for as difficult as it can be at times it is no less rewarding if you choose to accept the challenge. This book will provide an opportunity for you to consider why you practice karate, or why you are thinking of doing so. When you have read the book, don’t get sidetracked by becoming a fan or a critic. I have no need of either. Only celebrities have fans and I am no celebrity; as for critics, this is what Theodore Roosevelt had to say about them:

It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcomings, but who does actually strive to do the deed, who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself for a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place will never be with those timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat.

Hopefully, you will take what you find of value in these pages and use it to spur you on to a deeper and more profound understanding of yourself, your karate, and the world in which you live. Whatever school of karate you study or whichever path you walk through life, endeavor to conduct yourself with humility and quiet confidence, make the most of your opportunities, and do the best you can with the resources available to you. Your life is yours, your karate is yours too, so accept ownership of both and reap the rewards.

**Michael Clarke**  
Shinseidokan Karate Dojo  
Tasmania, September 2010



The new Shuren dojo, Itoman, Okinawa, opened just a few years after WWII.



## THE DOJO

Borrowed from the Buddhist tradition, the word *dojo* means “place of the way.” Originally used to describe a designated area or room in a temple complex where monks would go to receive instruction, it was borrowed by Japanese martial artists shortly after the fall of the Tokugawa Shogunate<sup>7</sup> and the end of the *bakufu*, or military government, in 1868. With the associated demise of the strict class system and the dissolution of the clans, many highly trained samurai found themselves without employment. Forced to earn a living, some turned their fighting skills to good use by teaching armed and unarmed combat.<sup>8</sup> Unknown at that time in mainland Japan, Okinawa’s indigenous martial art, then known as *ti* (pronounced *tee*), was also undergoing its own inevitable revolution. *Ti* is the name Okinawans gave to their empty hand fighting art, but they were not the originators of the fighting strategies or techniques; for that, they depended heavily on China. Emerging from the shadows of secrecy in the later years of the nineteenth century, *ti* was now being taught openly for the first time. By 1901, karate had been established within the public school system on Okinawa and from that time on, *sensei* (teachers of *ti*) followed their martial art counterparts in Japan by opening up public *dojo* and began accepting paying students.

Although not as austere as the *dojo* found in Japan, Okinawan *dojo* have always been considered a special place by those who gathered to practice in them. On an island so bereft of space, setting aside a large room solely for the purpose of training in karate was rarely possible and so more often than not the early *dojo* of Okinawa meant training in the gardens and small courtyards that once surrounded the typical Okinawan home. Before this, *ti*, or as we call it today, karate, was a secret activity taught in graveyards



High school students demonstrate karate kata on the grounds of Shuri jo.



High school students taking part in a mass kata demonstration.

and in hidden groves late at night and in the early hours of the morning. It would take some time before the Okinawans followed the Japanese model and moved their training indoors, and for many years yet, it would remain an almost exclusively outdoor pursuit. There are still men alive today, many of them Americans, who began their karate training in Okinawa this way, in their sensei's backyard. But there can be no doubt that karate is an international activity now, no longer a solely Okinawan pursuit; therefore, the influences upon it come from many different cultural backgrounds. Be that as it may, the original karate of Okinawa still exists, and the once tiny island kingdom of Ryukyu that straddled the gap in the East China Sea between China and Japan remains karate's spiritual home. The very nature of karate training reveals in those who practice it much more than an ability to fight. Okinawans have always understood this and are acutely aware of the benefits of karate training to both the individual and the wider community. They knew, through folklore and legend, of the mental and physical severity students of karate endured and believed that because of this, their society was a better place to live, populated as it was by men skilled in the fighting arts and imbued with a sense of integrity. The best of these men were known in Okinawa as bushi, men who had mastered the concept of Bunbu ryo do: the way of scholarship and the martial arts. It was bushi who first established dojo in Okinawa and began teaching karate and kobudo (empty hand fighting and old style weapons) to the general public. These men were teachers without rank, as we understand it in the martial arts these days, but with real skill, abilities, stature, and reputations that often spread island-wide and beyond.

A dojo back then, as today, was never large, for the luxury of space was rarely available to those teaching. This, in turn, acted as a natural restriction to the number of people practicing at any one time, but with training going on each evening, some of the early dojo still attracted an impressive number of students. As indicated earlier, however, gaining entry to the dojo of a karate sensei (teacher) was not always so easy. Many of them took their lead for accepting new students from the Chinese tradition where prospective trainees often underwent long periods of character testing before being accepted as a novice. Personal introductions too played a significant role, and older family members with some connection to a sensei, perhaps as a neighbor or colleague at work, were often the way young men gained an introduction to their teachers. When a new student arrived at the dojo, it was his job to prepare and clean the training area, making it ready for the seniors when they arrived. Back then there were no changing rooms, as there was nothing to change into. The karate training uniform (*keikogi*) used today was almost unheard of in Okinawa at that time, and students often trained in nothing more than a loincloth or perhaps their trousers; afterward, they simply got dressed and returned home to clean up. No showers, no bathrooms, no member's lounge, and no cold drinks machines either. Unlike the "health club" atmosphere found in some commercial karate clubs at present, the only thing to be found in a dojo back then was karate! In Okinawa these days, it is still the same, with few traditional dojo offering much more than a place to train. If you are lucky, there may be a toilet available; if you are very lucky, there may





## SHIN—MIND, SPIRIT

### The Circle of Budo

Concerning the concept of seishin tanren—the forging of your spirit ...

*In Budo, it takes one thousand days to learn a technique,  
ten thousand days to polish it; the difference between  
victory and defeat is measured in a fraction of a second.*

*—Japanese martial proverb*

The typically sober piece of advice above reflects a cultural outlook that is not altogether shared by many of the Okinawan masters of karate I have met and trained with over the past quarter of a century and more. Although no less serious in their endeavors than their Japanese counterparts, Okinawans also possess a certain sagacity when it comes to the significance of living a balanced life. The secret of Okinawan karate, if I can use such a phrase, lies not in the mastery of the technique but in the challenge of practicing karate every day. As Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), the great nineteenth-century essayist, philosopher, and poet wrote, “What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.” I strongly doubt Emerson was aware of karate or even Okinawa, for that matter, and yet in this one short statement he managed to point to the very heart of budo and to capture with great elegance the direction in which all budoka should focus their attention. Possibly the most common error people make when they begin training in karate is trying to learn and remember everything. I did it, and I am sure most people reading this book did it, too; be that as it may, progress in karate is not measured by an ability to remember every technique and repeat each of them on demand. For those of us striving to master Okinawa’s way of the empty hand, it is the unrelenting pursuit of physical movement free from conscious thought that lies at the heart of what we do. We aspire to move lightly and yet hit hard, blend instinctively with the incoming energy of a determined attack, and remain calm when all around is in turmoil. Is it any wonder then that reaching such a state of physical and mental balance takes, at the very least, a lifetime.

I traveled to Okinawa for the first time in February 1984. Back then, the airport was called Naha Field, and it had neither modern, sophisticated buildings nor the monorail link it has today. International flights were limited to Taiwan and Hong Kong. My journey from England took thirty-two hours and I passed through four countries as my flights hopped from London to Amsterdam, Dubai, Bangkok, Taipei, and finally into Okinawa. It was an isolated place back then and very few karateka from England had

made the trip before me. With the notable exception of Mark Bishop,<sup>33</sup> karateka from Britain who had reached Okinawa before my arrival had mainly been students of Uechi ryu.<sup>34</sup> When I arrived in early 1984 I began to search for the dojo of Morio Higaonna,<sup>35</sup> who at that time had yet to acquire the kind of status he holds these days. He had become well known among British karateka due to a television series produced by the BBC, called *The Way of the Warrior*. At the time, it was a revolutionary six-part look at the martial arts of Asia, and even though it was made so long ago, few subsequent productions have, in my opinion, managed to repeat its intelligent and insightful approach to the subject matter. The episode featuring karate, entitled “Karate, the Way of the Empty Hand,” featured Morio Higaonna in his dojo; he was forty-eight years old at the time and in his prime. I had been training in karate for ten years when I sat wide-eyed in front of my TV and watched a display of karate that left me questioning all I had been doing up to that point. Then, I held the rank of nidan (2<sup>nd</sup> *dan*) in Shito ryu karate,<sup>36</sup> had represented England in both kata and kumite competitions, and was teaching karate to others, but the importance of all that began to evaporate as I watched and listened to Morio Higaonna. It was as if a fog was lifting and I was catching a glimpse of how karate should be. It was not the first time I had seen Morio Higaonna; I had trained with him already, during a tour he made of Europe in late 1982. However, I was in a huge sports hall with perhaps three hundred others, and even my place on the front line did not provide me with much personal contact. There is an old Zen proverb that says, “When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.” I was ready, and there he was; the time was right for me to travel to Okinawa, and by a fortunate set of circumstances, I had the time and the finances to do it. All I needed was a contact. But as I mentioned earlier, few people in Britain had been to Okinawa back then, and of those who had, I knew exactly none! So I booked the flight anyway and trusted in karma<sup>37</sup> to see me through. My girlfriend, Kathy,<sup>38</sup> came with me and together we left a cold and wintry London on February 2, 1984, bound for exotic Okinawa. This part of my life has been well-documented already



Before morning training at the Higaonna dojo, Makishi, Okinawa.



## GI—TECHNIQUE

### The Purpose of Training: Karate Renshu

So far I have looked at concepts that may or may not be familiar to karateka. What follows in the next two chapters is, in many ways, the counterpoint to that truth-seeking discussion. While it is important to appreciate the significance of such philosophical underpinning, as karate without the maturing of your spirit leads to brutality, it is also important to note that karate must never be allowed to polarize in the opposite direction and become a solely theoretical exercise. In the dojo you foster a strong body and an even stronger mind; you lubricate the techniques of your karate with your sweat and strengthen your resolve by focusing on the problems at hand. In doing this, then karate, if taught and studied correctly, is ideal for the personal development of individuals whose sense of balance in life may not be all it could be.

In 1961, the late Shoshin Nagamine posted a large sign on the side wall of his dojo to help direct the minds of the growing number of American military personnel looking for instruction. Under the heading, “Ethics of the dojo: Courtesy—Cleanliness—Diligence,” it continues,

First of all, purify your mind. Cultivate the power of perseverance by strengthening your body and overcoming the difficulties that arise during training. The dojo is a special place where guts are fostered and superior human natures are bred through the ecstasy of sweating in hard work. The dojo is a sacred place where the human spirit is polished ...

Polishing the spirit (*sen ren shin*) is the term used to point the student of traditional karate toward the idea of developing fortitude. This is achieved through diligent training conducted frequently over a protracted period of time. Those who insist on looking for shortcuts or a quick fix in karate never cleanse their spirit; the very act of looking for such things ensures your spirit remains tainted. It is to some of the methods used in the polishing of your spirit that I turn now, and in doing so, hopefully, I will illustrate the way karate training (*renshu*) is merely the outward, physical expression of a deeper and more meaningful internal struggle. I hope to lay siege to the myth that the purpose of karate is purely one of learning how to fight. Indeed, if there is any sense of fighting at all in your training, then it is against the negative aspects of your own ego that you must look in order to find an adversary worth the trouble.



Shoshin Nagamine sensei  
(1907–1997)



Inside the Kodokan dojo, Kume, Okinawa.

## Fighting Strategies

When people think of fighting it would be fair to say they are usually thinking of some kind of clash between two or more individuals, with everyone involved hell bent on inflicting as much damage as possible to each other: karate takes a different view. If a disagreement turns physical and the need to protect yourself becomes necessary, karate's core message is to control the situation. This is done by dominating the other person, or persons, involved and then bringing the conflict to as speedy a conclusion as possible. The concept of 'sparring' plays no role in traditional karate training. Why? Because it encourages you to keep boxing. It gives you a false impression of what a real fight is like and allows you to gain a sense of confidence in your fighting ability that, in reality, could prove fatal. In his excellent book, *Meditations on Violence: A Comparison of Martial Arts Training & Real World Violence*, (page 30), Rory Miller had this to say regarding strategy training:

Goals differ in different situations. Real violence is a very broad subject and no two encounters are the same. What is a "win" in one situation may not be in the next. The *goal* is how to define the win in that particular encounter. Sometimes it will reflect your martial arts training. An incapacitating blow may be what you need. But sometimes the goal is to break away or to create enough space to access a weapon or just get enough air to scream for help. If the goal changes, so does everything else. If you have only trained for one goal, (e.g., the submission), you will be hampered when the goal is different.

He heads up this section of the book with the following maxim: “*Goals dictate strategy. Strategy dictates tactics. Tactics dictate techniques.*” Now, while it may look at first glance like Rory’s book has little to do with traditional karate training, I think otherwise. His attitude toward dealing with conflict is no different to the underlying principles found in the karate of Okinawa: assess the situation as best you can, adopt an appropriate attitude, posture, and distance, and above all, endeavor to dominate the situation as quickly as possible and by all means at your disposal. When you spar you do so governed by guidelines that would, in a real situation, leave you exposed to more danger than you may already be in. As Rory said, “Goals differ in different situations . . . If the goal changes, so does everything else.” When you engage in sparring, you change the goal because sparring is not motivated by violence. In karate, the goal is to stop the fight as soon as possible, and to this end, we often hear the term *ikken hisatsu*—one blow, one kill—being used. If you followed that maxim to the letter, it would of course lead to even more conflict, this time with the law. However, the *ikken hisatsu* adage is useful in that it reminds you yet again to bring the fight to a close with the minimum of techniques, an impossible goal when engaged in sparring. With sparring, there is no intention to stop the fight, only a desire to continue ‘boxing’ and to tag your partner in specifically designated, safe areas of the body, such as the chest or stomach. Unless the goal is to break the sternum, in a real fight punches are better placed elsewhere: in the face, on the jaw, to the kidneys, in the bladder, or under the arms on the side of the ribcage. Kicks too would be better placed in soft targets—like the groin, kidneys, spleen, bladder, or against the side of the knees, rather than higher up the torso as practiced in sparring where points are awarded for a “theoretically” successful hit.

There are a number of ways traditional karate training allows you to gain insight into sound fighting strategies that will help you overcome a stronger aggressor. At the risk of sounding somewhat ‘hippie-like’ here, it is better to blend and move with an attack, a little, than try to stand where you are and stop it. Okay, so the obvious needs to be mentioned here; attacks rarely happen in isolation. Unless the first strike was a knock-out blow, no fighter I ever came across on the street threw one punch or one kick and then stopped. The tactics I want to discuss here address strategies employed either in the split second immediately before ‘first contact’, or immediately after contact has already been made, if you have been grabbed, for example.



### Preparation Exercises: Junbi Undo

Before karate training proper begins, it is essential to prepare the mind and body; this is called junbi undo. While most karateka do some warm-up exercises, in traditional karate the method used is related to the fighting tradition being studied. Apart from preparing your body and mind for the training, the purpose of junbi undo is twofold: to enhance your overall flexibility and to improve your core strength. To do this, exercises include stretching and resistance, a combination that over time leads to both a greater flexibility and improved strength in all four limbs as well as the torso. The following junbi undo routine is performed before each training session at the Shinseidokan dojo, and is done for the reasons already stated, but also to bridge the divide between the life you live outside the dojo and the activity you engage in inside of it.

When you enter the dojo, you should leave your problems at the door. Training time is precious and should not become eroded by everyday matters that cannot be addressed during your training. Indeed, by applying yourself completely to the training at hand, you are often able to return to your daily life enriched by your efforts and better able to deal with your personal problems. It is for this reason, among others, that I say karate is as much a form of mental training as it is physical. For all you have done in life and all that you will do, everything begins in your mind. Without thought, you cannot have action. Balancing your conscious thought with an ability to act instinctively is the hallmark of someone who has not only mastered his martial art, but also the art of living. How or if you develop this sense of balance is a matter for you as an individual, and points to the way of karate being a personal journey; for in truth it can be nothing else. The appreciation of here and now, of being *in the moment*, although widely spoken of, remains an uncommon ability. When you are truly living in the moment, as in times of danger, then your poise and stability become evident. I know, from my own personal experience of being close to death on two separate occasions, when death draws near there can be an overwhelming sense of peace and acceptance; becoming completely aware of life as it edges close to ending seems ironic, and yet, I can think of nothing more capable of focusing your attention than the *finality* of your own demise. My survival from the abyss of death came in different ways, on two separate occasions; in 1978, I was saved from imminent multi-organ failure by the timely intervention of emergency surgery. On my recovery, the surgeon told me I was within half an hour of dying when I presented at the hospital; had all the operating theaters already been in use I would not have survived the

transfer to another hospital. Startling news perhaps, but I wasn't shocked by it at all; instead I felt quite unmoved by the whole thing, experiencing no great fear at the prospect of death. If anything, I was slightly ashamed that my ego had stopped me from dealing with the problem earlier. The thought of making my young wife a widow was the notion that bothered me the most, for that would have been a truly selfish act on my part. The Legionnaires disease I contracted in 1982 was vanquished as a result of my exceptionally high level of fitness at the time. The medical world was still unsure of how to treat the condition back then, so they plied me with antibiotics and hoped for the best. Again, the possibility of death was very real and even though I was aware of it, still, I cannot say I was frightened by the prospect of my life ending. I didn't *want* to die of course, I was only in my twenties, but *if* death was coming I had no fear of it. Perhaps a violent demise is different, perhaps a lonely end is different too, but I have not faced either of these situations so I cannot say; I can only relate how I felt on the two occasions when death stood at the end of my hospital bed: waiting. The poet Dylan Thomas wrote:

Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day.  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

I was not old when death came to visit but even if I am when it calls again, as call it must, I cannot say I fear its knock upon my door. I disagree with Thomas, if his counsel is to fight against nature; life is precious, no doubt, but as so many live lives without any great consciousness, it makes me wonder why they are so keen to hold onto it? It was my fitness that made the difference the second time I faced death; even so, my lungs were damaged by the illness and remain so to this day.

Some years ago, I had the privilege of meeting a master of *jujitsu*; his name was Jan de Jong. He died in April 2003, and in many respects his death was nothing unusual. He was in his eighties and had lived through many difficult and challenging times. Fighting against the German occupation forces in his native Holland during the Second World War, as a youthful member of the Dutch Resistance Movement, gave him a particular slant on life and the best way to live it. After the war he settled in Perth on Australia's West Coast and there raised a family. When de Jong sensei was diagnosed with a terminal condition, it came as a shock to everyone who knew him, especially his family. As you might expect, people close to him grew more and more sad as his health declined, and he entered a hospital to receive what comfort the medical world could offer. But for the man himself there was no sense of sadness, only acceptance. He spoke of having had a wonderful life and of being blessed by his wife, his children, and his many long-time students, some of whom had trained with him for well over thirty years. He laughed and joked and made light of the finality of the event about to take place, and when it came, he stepped away from this world as lightly as a butterfly lifting from a leaf. He not only lived well, but he had the great personal courage to die well. He was aware of what was

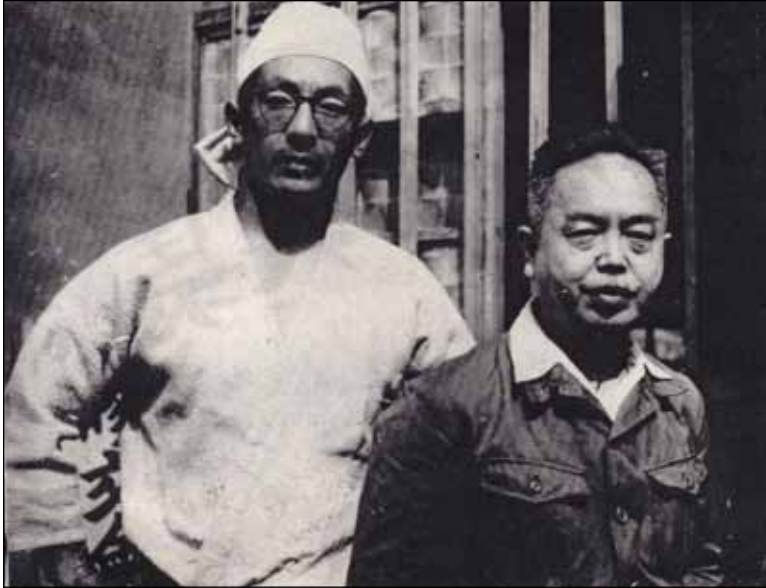


The late Jan de Jong sensei (1921–2003)

happening and faced it clearly, calmly, and with great dignity. As strange as this might seem to some, his example of being *present* at his own death displayed a level of almost unimaginable gallantry that I find truly inspirational.

It may seem unlikely that the exercises of junbi undo and the way you face your death are related, but consider this: budo teaches you to take responsibility, and to do that you need to be *present*. Being present is how you harmonize your mind and your body, your thoughts and your actions, and how you do everything in life while remaining fully aware of what you are doing: a condition the founder of analytical psychology Carl Jung (1875–1961) referred to as ‘individuation’. Developing your nature and being fully present in the moment is important, whether you are warming up your body before karate, or facing the final act of your earthly existence. Zen philosophy points to this idea of ‘being in the moment’. It reminds you that when you eat you should just eat, when you work you should just work, and when you relax you should just relax. It is not what you are doing but the way you are doing it that bestows the value. When you educate your body through the exercises of junbi undo, you should maximize the value and also train your mind; you do this by being fully present in the moment. At my dojo, junbi undo takes place at the beginning of every training session, and the following images have been included for illustrative purposes. I’m making no attempt to ‘teach’ the exercises here, only to show the type of preparation that is undertaken. If you are interested in performing any exercise you are unfamiliar with, I recommend you seek a qualified teacher to instruct you.





Kenwa Mabuni with his student, Chojiro Tani, outside Mabuni's Osaka dojo, ca. 1948.



Choki Motobu and his student, Miyashiro.



Chojun Miyagi (center) and Gichin Funakoshi (right) meeting in Japan.



## THE FUTURE FOR KARATE

### From Whence We Came: Okinawa

At a little over 26 degrees north of the equator, Okinawa enjoys a subtropical climate, and for much of the year its inhabitants live under clear blue skies. However, during the early summer months, typhoons sweep in off the Pacific Ocean bringing with them strong winds and huge seas often resulting in damage to property, and sometimes loss of life. The older wooden houses, still found in small pockets of undeveloped Okinawa, are characterized by their heavy tiled roofs, which anchor the buildings to the ground when the winds become strong enough to knock people off their feet. Okinawa island (*jima*) lies roughly midway along the *Nansei* archipelago, and is by far the largest of the forty-eight inhabited islands that run in a chain of one hundred and sixty islands stretching from the southern tip of Kyushu (considered part of mainland Japan) all the way to the northern tip of Taiwan. With an overall population of approximately one and a quarter million people, the largest city and the prefecture's capital is Naha, a city that is home to more than three hundred and sixteen thousand people. Densely populated in the south, the island of Okinawa reveals more of its natural beauty as you travel north. Once you get past the sprawling American military bases and the satellite towns that dominate the lower one third of the island, a quieter and gentler way of life is revealed. Although famous these days as the home of karate, the Okinawan culture is rich in its diversity; today its music, textiles, language, ceramics, and architecture, all unique to the ancient kingdom of Ryukyu, still lie waiting to be discovered and experienced by those lucky enough to travel there. Since my first visit to Okinawa, in February 1984, I have returned many times to learn karate from my teachers and to soak up the atmosphere and culture this unique society has to offer. Okinawa may be a political and economic part of Japan these days, but the people and their history tell a very different story from that of Yamoto.<sup>59</sup> I believe the study and practice of karate loses much of its value if you remove it from the cultural environment it evolved in; and while it would be a mistake for foreigners like me to pretend to be Okinawan, it is nevertheless important to develop a level of empathy for the culture. For those who do not yet have a personal experience of Okinawa, I want to introduce here a few of the cultural icons. Becoming familiar with them will help you place karate in its correct historical and cultural milieu. Although the Ryukyu Kingdom<sup>60</sup> has long since slipped into history, this southernmost modern prefecture of Japan continues to stand apart from the rest of the country; separated by the remnants of a different language and culture, its people still remain imbued with a powerful sense of being *Uchinanchu*.

## Music

You only have to listen to the music of Okinawa for the briefest of moments to notice the difference between it and the music of Japan; and even though the drum plays a pivotal role in the sound of the island, and other instruments too, like the *sanba* (similar to a Spanish castanet, but with three pieces of wood instead of two), it is the *sanshin* (a three stringed banjo-like instrument) with its instantly recognizable *twang* that best captures the spirit of the ancient Ryukyu Kingdom. With its slow and melodic strumming, often accompanied by an even more solemn vocal delivery from the player, the music can evoke all kinds of images.

From the oppressive heat and humidity of summer to the cooling winds blowing gently in off the East China Sea, the *sanshin* can portray each with equal subtlety and intensity. Love songs and songs to work by in the fields or on the tiny fishing boats are all sung with the *sanshin* providing a jaunty rhythm by which the islander's dreams and toil are celebrated. The instrument is said by legend to have been invented by Akainko, a musician who lived long ago. Sheltering from the rain one day, he began to notice the sound of the water dripping from the roof. He set about making the very first *sanshin* (san—three, shin—string) soon afterward and began traveling from village to village giving impromptu performances. His music became so popular among the people that even the royal court began to hear of it, and from that point on the *sanshin* began to be played for the king himself. As wonderful as this story sounds, the reality is somewhat less romantic. Historians believe the *sanshin* came to Okinawa from China as a slightly bigger instrument called a *sanxian*; the Okinawans then adapted it into the smaller *sanshin* we see today. Not to be confused with the Japanese *shamisen*, which the Okinawan instrument predates, the strings of the *sanshin* are picked, using a plectrum, or *bachi*, which is traditionally made from the horn of a water buffalo.

Drumming too is a major part of the traditional music of Okinawa, and during the summer months huge gatherings called *eisa* are held in various locations. *Eisa* are said to date back at least four hundred years and to have evolved from Buddhist inspired dances performed by young people during the Bon Festival, a time each summer when the



The Okinawan *sanshin*.



## STORIES OF THREE GREAT MEN

There is an aspect of training on Okinawa of which I am particularly fond, the story telling. It can happen at any time but most often it occurs after training, when the sweating is over for the day and everyone retires to a local izakaya, where food and a few cold beers help ease the body's aches and pains, relieve the tiredness, and deepen the bonds between student and teacher. At such times as this, Okinawa's rich oral history surrounding karate and kobudo begins to flow from one generation to the next, and stories of former bushi emerge from the past to enrich the present and inspire the future. I am conscious of the fact that an opportunity to sit around a table with various Okinawan masters is beyond the reach of many, and so before this book comes to an end I would like to share a few budo stories with you. To do so I have plucked from the past three men who have, each in his own way, contributed greatly to the art. They all lived and came to prominence as bushi at different times in Okinawan history and represent the three main streams of Okinawan karate, namely, Tomari te, Naha te, and Shuri te. But remember, these stories are just that: stories! Although they are told about real people and 'sometimes' real events, they are not to be taken as hard-core facts. The purpose the stories serve is inspirational, to help motivate you to do better when you're next in the dojo, or as you move through life. Like the parables found in Christianity and the lessons found in the study of Zen, the veracity of many karate stories do not always stand close inspection, but as I said, that's not the point: the tales are told for reasons other than the transmission of facts.

Another function of these stories in the learning of Okinawan karate is to give depth and history to the activity you are engaged in, to show what you are pursuing today was pursued by others long ago, and that the challenges you are currently facing were also faced by budoka decades before you were even born. Learning that others have stood where you stand now, and that they found ways to move forward, to improve, and to go beyond the seemingly overwhelming problems in front of them, can afford immense support when times are tough. Appreciating that you walk the budo path alone while remembering you walk in the shadow of others who have traveled that way before offers hope. Listening to stories from karate's past has a way of making your way ahead seem less impossible, although only a fool would think the stories made the path any less difficult. If your predecessors had to make sacrifices to make progress, it would be a mistake to believe you won't have to also. The stories are there to point you toward the attributes you need to make these sacrifices. Bringing forth courage, humility, honesty, charity, and integrity when you need them will be no easy task. But the pursuit of budo karate is the

pursuit of all of these attributes and more, so take heed, listen to the tales of those who have gone before you, and learn. Learn that the way of karate is about more than kicking and punching, more than trophies and titles, and more than fame and fortune. If you come to understand this through your efforts on the dojo floor and the stories you hear from your teachers and seniors, then you will understand why such stories need to be told and retold to each generation of karateka that comes along. If we who teach karate today fail to do this, then we become responsible for the loss of something precious.

### Kosaku Matsumora (1829–1898): The Ethical Master of Tomari te

Perhaps best remembered today for disarming a sword-wielding samurai with nothing more than a wet towel, the life of Tomari's Kosaku Matsumora reads like a novel. Born in 1829, he was the eldest son of Koten Matsumora, an indirect descendent of the first Okinawan King through his connection to the Yuji clan. His childhood name was Tarukane; but he was also known by the Chinese name, Yuikan. Small in stature, even for an Okinawan, he nevertheless grew into a strong young man with broad shoulders and a chest that was said to be as big as a bull's; contemporary accounts often describe Matsumora's physical appearance as impressive. How fortunate then, that his moral education was as comprehensive as the tutoring he received in the martial arts. As a child he studied the Chinese classics as well as Confucianism. This seems to have been the educational standard of the day for children coming from families with 'connections'. Although his father's link to the Yuji clan no doubt brought with it a certain measure of prestige among his Tomari village peers, it was of no great use in financial terms. Kosaku was going to have to make his own way in the world, at a time when the social upheaval unfolding within the Kingdom of Ryukyu was steadily moving toward its inevitable conclusion. Japan, which had invaded Ryukyu in 1609, was changing from a feudal system into a constitutional based nation, and Okinawa, as the center of the Ryukyu Kingdom, would be required by its masters to comply.

Tomari village, like other locations around Okinawa, had for many years operated a level of jurisdictional control over its inhabitants. While it acted as the official port for the royal capital, Shuri, it also maintained a certain level of fiscal independence. Tomari was not unique in this, as each village had its own 'communal property' in the form of small plots of land and, to some extent or other, its own store of funds with which it paid for activities the village elders felt were beneficial to the community. These days we might think of this arrangement as being similar to paying local or state taxes to take care of local needs, and consider these as being separate from government taxes. In Tomari village, the communal wealth was known as *Neewagumuchi* (knee-wa-goo-moo-chee) and it was to play a significant role in the life



Kosaku Matsumora



## IN CONCLUSION

*The pursuit of progress is often arrogant because it fails to take into account lessons from the past and the extent to which our present understanding is built upon them. Tradition, on the other hand, is often paralyzed by rigidity of thought and action; in such cases, the tradition dies a slow and painful death. The key to personal growth lies in understanding balance.*

—the Author

The aim of this book has been to point you toward the hidden depths of appreciation and the tangible benefits that come with the study of Okinawa's indigenous fighting arts. But be aware that it barely scratches the surface of what awaits those who take the plunge into the world of traditional Okinawan karate training. I make no claim to be the best or the only person teaching karate; in fact, I am happy to proclaim my limitations as both a student and a teacher of the art. There are sensei living throughout the world today with far more experience than I have and are far more able in their teaching methods too. But if the content of this book has captured your imagination or inspired you in any way, then I would urge you to seek out individuals who are teaching budo through the Okinawan fighting arts. They are people who by their very nature actively avoid the glare of publicity and celebrity, so finding them won't be easy, and neither will your attempts to gain access to their dojo. You will have to be patient, use your intelligence, and approach with humility. You may have to travel a great distance from your home, but that alone should not discourage you, for nothing of any value in life is gained without sacrifice in one form or another. Once you gain access to a traditional dojo, you will discover that was the easy part; the most difficult challenge budo has to offer is revealed in the continuous training, day after day, year after year. Karate is not limited to budo; it can also be engaged through the medium of keeping fit, and sport. If you're looking for a different kind of challenge to that offered by budo, then fix your sights in another direction and consider joining a karate club. They are far more common and have much to recommend to those who would like to know something of karate, yet don't want what budo has to offer. Please remember, though, the choices you make in life dictate



Ko Uehara sensei, ca. 1989, prefers to train in a Chinese shirt.

the experiences you have; you won't find budo where budo can't be found. So make your choice between a karate dojo and a karate club, and then immerse yourself wholeheartedly in your new-found pursuit.

If you are determined to discover a dojo, find a sensei, and face the challenges of training in karate in the traditional Okinawan way, then the following advice will help. First, approach the sensei with humility and patience, not with a list of requirements and requests. Next, don't expect the sensei to want to teach you just because you want him to teach you. Even before you approach a dojo, educate yourself as much as you can in the history of the martial art being taught there; but don't speak as if you comprehend the training. Remember, at this point you have only a little knowledge of the tradition; you don't have an understanding of it. Of the two, knowledge is inexpensive, you can get it from a book, but understanding is a lot more costly. You will pay for your understanding over a long period of time with the currency of experience; for in budo, experience is the only recognized method of payment for understanding. Should you be lucky enough to gain entry to a dojo, leave your expectations at the door, as they will be of no use to you now; and besides, you are there to learn from your experiences, not behave as if you have already had them. Remember what the late Okinawan karate master Shoshin Nagamine had to say about a dojo:

The dojo is a special place where guts are fostered and superior human natures are bred through the ecstasy of sweating in hard work. The dojo is a sacred place where the human spirit is polished. Purify your mind and cultivate the power of perseverance by strengthening your body and overcoming the difficulties that arise during training.<sup>63</sup>

Karate, at least in Okinawa, was never intended to be a sport, nor was it intended to provide individuals with an income. Since its earliest days, karate has been a civilian method of self-protection, undertaken by young men who felt a need for such training. Although not exclusive to any one section of Okinawan society, prospective karate students were vetted for signs of negative character traits, and even though some individuals slipped through the net, by and large, the system worked to keep the knowledge of karate, and kobudo, free from those who might use that knowledge mindlessly. Arguments are regularly put forth these days that karate would have died out long ago had it not taken the sporting and commercial route, and the reason there are tens of millions of karateka around the world today is due to the appeal of sport and the ingenuity of the commercial entrepreneur. I have to concede, at least a little. This argument is not without some merit for I also believe karate, if it had continued to be passed from one generation to the next in the traditional manner, would certainly not have the millions of followers it has today. That said, I lament the current situation, with its shift away from the dojo and from teachers and students taking personal responsibility for their karate. I'm disappointed that many karate teachers accept students based on their ability to pay rather than their character. I'm saddened that many karate teachers no longer

# Notes

## Chapter One

1. Profiles of many of these individuals can be found in Tetsuhiro Hokama's book, *100 Masters of Okinawan Karate* and Masahiro Nakamoto's book, *Okinawa Kobudo*.
2. An English translation of the March 23, 1934, document was published in 1993 by the International Ryukyu Karate Research Society (IRKRS). The second document is the January 28, 1936 speech given by Chojun Miyagi following a demonstration of karate in Sakai Suji, Osaka; it can be found on page 81 of Morio Higaonna's book *The History of Karate*. In each of these documents, the information being presented is essentially the same.
3. Shoshin Nagamine (1907–1997) was the founder of the *Matsubayashi* school of *Shorin ryu karate*. The co-creator of the *gekisai kata*, along with Chojun Miyagi, *gekisai dai ichi* reflects the karate of Shuri, whereas *gekisai dai ni* leans more toward the karate of Naha. I met Nagamine sensei a couple of times in 1992 and spoke with him at length about karate.
4. Chuan fa is another term for Chinese martial arts otherwise known as *kung fu* or *wushu*.

The Eight Precepts of Chuan fa are

1. The human mind is one with heaven and earth
  2. Blood circulates the body with the movement of the sun and moon
  3. Inhaling is gentle, exhaling is strong
  4. Adjust to changing circumstances
  5. The hands should move without conscious thought
  6. Distance and bearing will dictate the outcome
  7. See beyond the obvious
  8. Expect the unexpected
5. Sun-Tzu (ca. 500–400 B.C.) was a Chinese military commander best known as the author of *The Art of War*.
  6. Many stories of Okinawan masters being the worse for alcohol have been passed down through the ages in the rich oral tradition of karate on the island. Almost all the great teachers of the past have one or more tales attached to their name, highlighting their ability to defend themselves from ruffians and thieves, even when they were intoxicated. Kanryo Higaonna (Higashionna) is no different in this regard. As a youth living in China he took part in street fights to test his fighting skills and later, upon his return to Okinawa, it is known he frequented the Tsuji district of Naha, an area of the city well known, even today, for its seedy drinking establishments and brothels. On page 27 of his book, *The History of Karate*, Morio Higaonna relates a story of a drunken Kanryo Higaonna making his way home from Tsuji and how he defended himself from a surprise attack by a much larger antagonist. The veracity of the story is not in doubt, at least not by me; but like many of the stories you hear in Okinawa, there is a common and often familiar ring to it.

## Chapter Two

7. Beginning in 1603, and lasting two hundred and sixty-five years until 1868, Japan was ruled by one family: the Tokugawa. This reign began when the country was unified under one military warlord, Ieyasu Tokugawa, following his success at the battle of *Sekigahara* in 1600. In 1603, Ieyasu was proclaimed *Shogun*, a title first granted by the Emperor to Yoritomo Minamoto toward the end of the twelfth century. Meaning “commander-in-chief for the suppression of barbarians,” it was a title used by the person holding the real power in Japan, for the emperor had long since lost it. Successive Shogun ran Japan as they saw fit, which usually meant by military force. Ieyasu, however, came up with a system to keep the country's warlords under control. Part of each year the warlords, or daimyo, were expected to live in the capital where Ieyasu could keep an eye on them. For the remaining months, when they were free to return to



their domain, they were obliged to leave their families behind in the capital. It was a system that worked well, and the Tokugawa *Shogunate* faced few serious challenges to its rule.

8. In F. J. Norman's excellent little book *The Fighting Men of Japan*, he talks of his encounter with a former samurai. The book is a memoir of Norman's time living in Japan during the 1880s, and in part, he covers his interest in Japanese fencing and wrestling. One of the first, if not 'the' first Westerner to study kendo, Norman began training in 1888. This is what he had to say about one of the men he met at the dojo:

Among the many swordsmen who used to put in their daily attendance at the Takanawa fencing room—dojo—was one who very early attracted my attention. He was an elderly man, and in some respects a finer swordsman than Umezawa, who introduced me to him one day as his sensei or teacher. Onoda was his name, and though he was exceedingly tall for a Japanese he was quite the best built one I have come across. For a long time I could gather nothing more about him than that he did not like foreigners, and that it would be just as well if I did not thrust my acquaintance-ship upon him. Later on, I learned he was, or had been, the hereditary fencing master to the late Shogun or "generalissimo" of Japan.



Former samurai turn to teaching martial arts and ken-jutsu.

9. The term "salary men" is used to describe men who work long hours for their company, take few holidays, and can be found napping on trains and buses in every major city in Japan.
10. The Shotokan Karate International Federation (SKIF) was established in 1978 by Hirokazu Kanazawa.
11. Like most translations from Japanese to English it is difficult, if not impossible, to find an exact meaning that bridges the gap between the two languages. I have always found it more useful to think of the meaning of what I am trying to say, rather than get bogged down in the technicalities of syntax. *Ona-gaishimasu*, or a variation of it, is used in many different situations. It suggests a feeling of friendliness and good intentions toward someone in your future dealings with him. In karate it is used when bowing prior to training with a partner, or sometimes when you arrive at the dojo and make your initial bow to the shomen. Sometimes translated as "Please help me," broadly speaking it means something more like, "I hope we can work well together and achieve good things."
12. For the most part, it was the Japanese who spread karate around the world, hence the link between karate and the Japanese language. Nevertheless, there remain many Okinawan words and phrases connected to karate that are not found in standard Japanese; *muchi*, for example, is a word used to describe a heavy almost magnetic feeling with either the ground or an opponent. The difference between *Nihongo* (Japanese) and *Uchinaguchi* (Okinawan) is clear and undeniable. The word *Hogen* points to *Uchinaguchi* being nothing more than a regional dialect of Japanese and is considered a derogatory term by many older Okinawans; they have a saying, "*Umarijimanu kutuba washine kuninwashinyun*": "Forget the language of your island and you will also forget your country."
13. *Kana* are phonetic symbols used to write words not covered by kanji. There are two types of kana: hiragana, used to write the inflectional endings to kanji, and katakana, which are used to write foreign words. Although hiragana and katakana make the same sounds, they are different in appearance, hiragana being more soft and rounded and katakana being sharp and angular.

## Glossary

**aikido.** A Japanese martial art based on the teachings of Morihei Ueshiba.

**ashi barai.** A leg or foot sweeping technique used to destroy an opponent's balance.

**ataraxia.** A word used by the Greek philosopher, Pyrrho of Elis, to describe "inner peace."

**awamori.** An alcoholic drink popular in Okinawa made from distilled rice (different from sake).

**bachi.** A large plectrum made from buffalo horn and used on Okinawa in the playing of the sanshin.

**bakufu.** Literally meaning, 'camp office', it was the name given to the military government system, which ruled Japan until the Meiji Revolution in 1868.

**bashofu.** A type of Okinawan textile made from the fibers of the banana tree.

**bassai.** See also **passai.** A karate kata with several variations, of which bassai dai and bassai sho are the best known in Japanese karate schools.

**bingata.** A type of brightly colored print design found throughout the Ryukyu Islands.

**bo.** A staff of wood approximately six-feet in length, used in the practice of kobudo.

**bojutsu.** The techniques used to fight using a 'bo'.

**bokken.** A wooden sword used for training purposes.

**Bubishi.** See also **Wubeizhi.** Translation: *Account of Military Art and Science*, a Chinese martial arts book written in 1621, which for centuries has been held in great esteem by Okinawa's fighting men.

**budo.** The 'military way'. A term used these days to describe learning a martial art to help develop a person's character.

**budoka.** A person who puts into practice the lessons taught by budo teachings.

**Budo Mountain.** A term used to describe the physical, philosophical, and psychological journey undertaken by budoka.

**Bunbu ryo do.** A term used to describe the balance of training in the martial arts and achieving scholarship as a way of deepening an appreciation of both.

**bunkai.** A word used to describe the techniques that make up a kata, but also used to denote the practice of breaking down a kata into workable strategies based on sound fighting principles.

**bushi.** In Japan this title applies to samurai; in Okinawa it denotes a gentleman who is also highly skilled in the martial arts.

**bushido.** The way of the warrior.

**bussho.** Doing something every day, which brings you closer to the place you want to be.

**Butokukai. (Dai Nippon Butokukai).** A martial arts organization set up in Japan in the nineteenth century to govern the practice of all martial arts throughout the country.

**chakuchi.** Changing legs, from forward to rear, without changing position in relation to the opponent.

**Ch'an.** This is the Chinese reading of Zen.

**chiishi.** Chi—strength, ishi—stone: a tool used in Okinawan karate to promote strength in the arms, wrists, and hands.

**chinto.** A karate kata practiced in schools originating from Shuri te.

**chonon.** Usually the eldest son, the boy destined to become the heir to a family business.

**chuan fa.** A term that more correctly describes Chinese fighting arts than the term 'kung fu'.

**chudan kamae.** An 'on-guard' posture with at least one arm covering the middle (chest) area of the body.

**chudan ura uke.** Mid-level block using the back of the hand.

**chudan uke.** A block which covers the middle (chest) area of the body from attack.

**dachi.** Stance.

**daimyo.** A rank within Samurai, a daimyo was the equivalent of a European Baron in medieval times. A Lord who had absolute power of life and death over all who lived within his domain.

**dan.** Japanese word meaning, 'position'. In karate, it denotes a person's position, 'rank' within the art.

**dan-i.** The ranking system used in karate and other martial arts to rank its practitioners.

**deshi.** Student.

**do-gi.** See also **keikogi**, **gi**, and **karategi**. The uniform worn during karate training,

**dojang.** The Korean name for the place where martial arts (Taekwondo, Hapkido, etc.) training takes place; it can be thought of in the same way as the Japanese word, dojo.

**dojo.** Literally meaning 'the place of the way,' this word was borrowed by early Japanese commercial instructors from the Buddhist tradition where a room (called a dojo) in a monastery is set aside for the students to learn from their master.

**doryoku.** To make a great effort.

**ehsa.** Mass gatherings of dancers and musicians on Okinawa held during the summer months.

**embusen.** The 'line' followed during kata practice in Japanese schools of karate.

**empi.** Old Japanese word for elbow.

**empi uchi.** Striking with the elbow.

**fukugi.** A type of tree used in former times throughout the Ryukyu Islands to line roads and mark village boundaries.

**fukyugata ni.** The name used in the Matsubayashi School of karate for the gekei sai kata found in Goju ryu.

**ganken.** An area just inside a Japanese home, or dojo, where shoes are removed. To go beyond the ganken wearing shoes is considered extremely bad mannered.

**gasshuku.** To lodge together, to gather for the practice a martial art without distraction.

**gedan barai.** A sweeping block covering the lower (stomach-groin) area of the body.

**gedan zuki.** A punch to the lower part of the body.

**gekisai.** To smash and destroy: the name given to the two kata devised by Chojun Miyagi and Shoshin Nagamine in 1940.

**gekisai dai ichi.** The first of two gekisai kata, this one devised by Shoshin Nagamine.

**gekisai dai ni.** The second of two gekisai kata, this one devised by Chojun Miyagi.

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## Recommended Reading

At the beginning of each year, I place a list of books on the dojo notice board. These are titles I feel will help the students at the Shinseidokan dojo to grow and develop as karateka. I want to do the same here. If you have found this book valuable then I believe you will find much in the recommended titles in this list. When you train yourself in karate you are obliged to train your whole body; this includes your mind. A well-developed physique without a well-developed brain to control it is of limited use to either you or the community. Reading exercises the brain and improves your intellect. It broadens your appreciation of life and of karate; therefore, reading—studying—as a natural part of your training should not be neglected. Although I feel all the books listed here are worth reading, I have avoided listing them in order of importance: you will be the judge of that. I haven't even listed them in alphabetical order. I have, however, grouped the books into broad categories and, to help you identify the book you are looking for, I have given the ISBN reference where one exists, as well as the title and author. But please note, many of the best books written about Okinawan martial arts that I've discovered have been privately published and no ISBN was assigned to them; so, if you cannot find some of these titles in bookshops, try looking for them on the Internet, or contacting the author directly. The list is by no means exhaustive; I have not read every good book written on karate, nor have I listed what I consider to be the 'best' books. I am merely pointing you toward books I think are worth reading. So please treat this list as suggestive only.

### Okinawan Karate

- The Essence of Okinawan Karate*, by Shoshin Nagamine: ISBN 0-8048 1163-6  
*Tales of Okinawa's Great Masters*, by Shoshin Nagamine: ISBN 0-8048 2089-9  
*Okinawa's Complete Karate System*, by Michael Rosenbaum: ISBN 1-886969-91-4  
*The Teachings of Karate*, by Heiko Bittmann: ISBN 3-9807316-2-6  
*The History of Karate*, by Morio Higaonna: ISBN 0-946062 36 6  
*Okinawa Kobudo*, by Masahiro Nakamoto  
*Zen Kobudo*, by Mark Bishop: ISBN 0-8048-2027-9  
*Okinawan Karate* (Second Edition), by Mark Bishop: ISBN 0-7136-5083-4  
*The Art of Hojo Undo*, by Michael Clarke: ISBN 978-1-59439-136-1  
*Roaring Silence: A Journey Begins*, by Michael Clarke: ISBN 0-9544466-1-5  
*Karate-do: My Way of Life*, by Gichin Funakoshi: ISBN 0-87011-463-8,  
ISBN 0-87011-241-4  
*Three Budo Masters*, by John Stevens: ISBN 4-7700-1852-5  
*Training with Funakoshi*, by Dr. Clive Layton: ISBN 0-9513406-3-8  
*Secrets of Uechi-ryu Karate*, by Alan Dollar: ISBN 0-9651671-1-9  
*Tanpenshu: Untold Stories of Gichin Funakoshi*, by Patrick & Yuriko McCarthy  
*Karate My Art*, by Choki Motobu; Translated by Patrick & Yuriko McCarthy

*Timeline of Karate History*, by Tetsuhiro Hokama  
*100 Masters of Okinawan Karate*, by Tetsuhiro Hokama  
*History & Traditions of Okinawan Karate*, by Tetsuhiro Hokama: ISBN 0-920129-19-6

## Japanese Karate

*Fundamentals of Karate-Do*, by Keiji Tomiyama: ISBN 1-873764-00-6  
*The Way of Sanchin Kata*, by Kris Wilder: ISBN 978-1-59439-084-5  
*The Karate Experience: A Way of Life*, by Randall G. Hassell: ISBN 0-8048-1348-5  
*Karate My Life*, by Hirokazu Kanazawa: ISBN 4-9901694-2-5  
*Karate Training: The Samurai Legacy and Modern Practice*, by Robin L. Rielly:  
ISBN 0-8048 1488-0  
*Moving Zen* by C. W. Nicol: ISBN 0-981764-515  
*Spirit of the Empty Hand*, by Stan Schmidt: ISBN 0-911921-00-2  
*The Budo Karate of Mas Oyama*, by Cameron Quinn: ISBN 0-7316 1119 5  
*The Human Face of Karate*, by Tadashi Nakamura: ISBN 4-07-975055-2  
*One Day—One Lifetime*, by Tadashi Nakamura: ISBN 9780804830645  
*Karate: Technique and Spirit*, by Tadashi Nakamura, ISBN: 4-07-974179-0  
Periodical: *Shotokan Karate Magazine*

## Recommended (DVD) Viewing

*Okinawan Karate: Dojo and Masters*, vols. 1 and 2. Produced by *Karate Bushido Magazine*, Paris, France.  
*Okinawan Karate: Indomitable*. Shorin ryu Shobukan, Uema dojo (Okinawa). Produced by Okinawa Eizou Center Co, Ltd, Okinawa.  
*The Empty Mind—The Spirit and Philosophy of Martial Arts*. Produced by Budo Films, Miami Beach, Florida, United States.

## Online Resources—Blogs

<http://www.Okinawakarateblog.blogspot.com>  
<http://www.Gojukenkyukai.blogspot.com>  
<http://www.Karatejutsu.blogspot.com>  
<http://www.Chibanaproject.blogspot.com>  
<http://www.Yamada-san.blogspot.com>  
<http://www.Shinseidokandojo.blogspot.com>  
<http://www.kowakan.com>

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Bezaitendo shrine, used to house Buddhist scriptures from Korea.

## About the Author

Michael Clarke was born in Dublin, Ireland, in May 1955, and moved to England with his family at the age of three. He grew up in one of Manchester's less affluent neighborhoods and left school as soon as legally possible, at the age of fifteen. His later teenage years were fraught with violence on the streets, at soccer games, in pubs and bars—in fact, anywhere a crowd gathered and an opportunity to brawl presented itself. It was a lifestyle that saw him arrested and facing a court of law on more occasions than any young man should. His final conviction landed him behind bars, and it was from here he began his slow climb back to propriety and self respect.



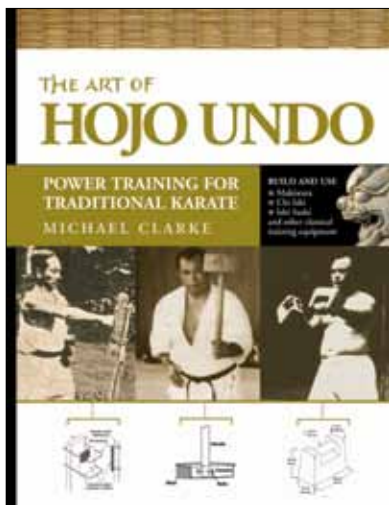
Photo by Charlie Suriano/Blitz Enterprises

Walking into a karate dojo for the first time in January 1974, his mind was slowly opened to the possibilities of another way of life, a life where problems were solved by fighting the belligerence that smoldered within him at the time. He never stopped fighting: he just turned his aggression inward, away from the focus on others, and aimed it squarely at his own character. Today that fight continues. Michael has been practicing karate for more than two-thirds of his life and has traveled the world to do so.

As well as the years of physical training and research into the art of karate, his articles and interviews have been published over the past twenty-five years in magazines from New Zealand to England and America to Japan. As well, he has had four books published, including his previous multi-award winning book, *The Art of Hojo Undo: Power Training for Traditional Karate*. Often confrontational, Michael's writing attracts both support and disapproval in large measure. Nevertheless, he is one of the few internationally recognized karateka writing today who is able to point the way to a more meaningful future by observing lessons learned in the past.

Michael lives quietly in Northern Tasmania with his wife, Kathy. He trains in karate and kobudo by himself each morning in the small dojo standing discreetly at the rear of his home and teaches only those few students who are willing to make the necessary commitment. He continues to visit Okinawa regularly to practice karate with his sempai (seniors) and friends at the Jundokan dojo and to immerse himself ever deeper into kobudo, the ancient weapon arts of Ryukyu.

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*Michael Clarke, Kyoshi 7th dan, Okinawan Goju-ryu, has trained in Karate since 1974. He has written over two hundred articles for international martial arts magazines and authored three books. A young 'street fighter' in England who became a disciplined student of budo in Okinawa, Clarke enthusiastically teaches traditional Goju-ryu Karate in his dojo near Launceston, Tasmania, Australia.*

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