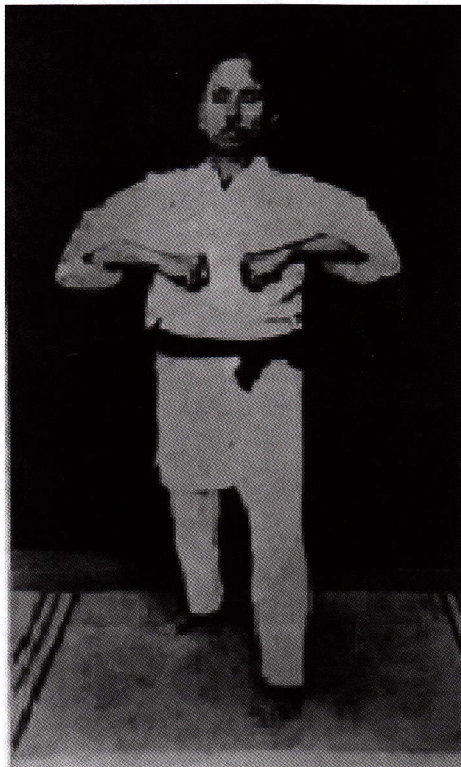


# KARATE-JUTSU, KARATE-DO & SPORTS KARATE. By Dr Wolf Herbert.

Hermann Bayer has in his books "Analysis of Genuine Karate 1 & 2" cogently suggested to differentiate between three different kinds of Karate: "classical" self-protecting Okinawan karate-jutsu, "traditional" form-only self-perfecting Japanese karatedo, and "modern" sports karate." These dissimilar forms of Karate describe the chronology of the transmission of Karate from a hermetic art of self-defense (Karate-jutsu) in Okinawa to the Japanese main island (Hondo), where it developed into an athletic, recreational and spiritual way for self-cultivation (Karate-do). With its internationalization and competition-oriented diffusion over the globe it transmuted into a dynamic sport with a propensity for professionalization (represented by the WKF, World Karate Federation, which I shall henceforth term Olympic Karate). This threefold categorization is valid on a very abstract and bird's-eye view and describes the sequential historical unfolding, however with a closer look at the current reality, things are quite more complex.

Likewise complex and multifaceted are the books of Dr. Bayer and I shall pick up (or on) only the above mentioned classification and terminology and add some observations of mine. Let me beforehand qualify my reflections with a statement Bayer makes in the preface of his first book: "All my thoughts and conclusions are based on my personal level of knowledge and insight." Thus my suppositions are likewise of limited scope and open to discussion. Dr. Bayer expresses "the hope that the entire karate world finally decides to stringently use these different terms (introduced above, W.H.) for the different versions of the art we love." But can the nowadays pluralistic and hybridised Karate-scene really be cut out "stringently" into these three types of Karate?

Let's start with Karate-jutsu. There are quite a few Okinawan masters who instead of "Karate" prefer to speak of "Kenpo", "Todi" or "te/ti" when characterizing their autochthonous skills of self-defence. Many on the other hand speak of "Karate-do" thus incorporating the Japanese "way" in the sense of an holistic human endeavour. With Karate's dissemination to mainland Japan it was imbued with the concept of "do", which can also be found in other martial and fine arts or even as a codified way of how to arrange flowers, drink tea, appreciate incense or draw a sword. Since Karate has been globally promulgated by the Japanese



"Gichin Funakoshi, here performing kata Hangetsu, was told that Karate was the art of Kunshi."

as "Karate-do", the label "do" can help to appeal to an international audience. It would be an interesting task to empirically look into how the several hundred dojo on Okinawa name their "Karate" before claiming that Okinawan Karate ought to be categorically called "Karate-jutsu", unless restricted to the historical period before its popularization. This would be an imposition from outside of which Bayer is extremely wary of himself. In fact most of the umbrella organizations of the officially recognized Okinawan styles (Shorin, Goju, Uechi, Kobudo) have "Karatedo" in their names. Moreover the transition from "jutsu" to "do" already evolved in Okinawa with the efforts of Itosu Anko to get Karate into the curriculum of public schools. At the beginning of the 20th century it was subsequently taught there in groups and military drill-fashion after "dangerous" techniques have been eliminated. Karate has then already morphed from a self-protective *jutsu* into a form of physical education.

The "jutsu" can be seen as a "value-neutral" – as Bayer puts it – tool for self-defence devoid of any ethical or moral codes and with the goal of "creating the most possible damage to an opponent in the most efficient way." Yet I contend that it was hardly ever only understood in a mere instrumental sense. Since the Warring States period (around 475-221 BCE) in China, martial arts, notably archery, have

been seen as a form of mental training and inner cultivation. Confucius practiced archery for inner development and later the longsword became the preferred weapon for the literati for self-perfection.

Funakoshi relates that he was told Karate was the art of the *kunshi*. The *kunshi* is the Confucian ideal of a refined, noble gentlemen, who is proficient not only in poetry, calligraphy, literature and other fine arts, but also in the martial ways.

The Samurai ideal of *bunbu ryodo*, the pen and the sword, was not contrived by the Japanese, but can be found in Chinese texts from the Tang dynasty (618-907). Practitioners of Karate in Okinawa, particularly those of the Shuri-version, were of aristocratic background and thoroughly educated and versed in the Confucian classics and therefore well aware of the aspect of self-refinement in the martial arts. They nevertheless developed their martial abilities into a lethal and most effective way to eliminate potential foes. The practice of martial arts however was always connected to ulterior principles than just to a skill to kill.

The Japanized version of a mainly spiritually oriented way of self-perfection based on *kata* without any competitive format is a rather marginal phenomenon. This is certainly true of the *Doshinkan*, which Bayer cites as a paradigmatic example. Bayer happened to train in this group in Vienna and therefore recurs to it.

The Doshinkan derives from the lineage of Toyama Kanken, a direct disciple of Funakoshi Gichin, who became active on the Japanese main island. Of much greater international profile and by far larger membership however is the Shotokai, founded by Egami Shigeru. They do not hold competitions and have a strong emphasis on spiritual matters. The Shotokai would be a more representative example for the old "Japanized way" of practicing Karate. Egami, as can be gleaned from his writings, however was highly interested, if not obsessed, with the most effective way to strike. His experiments, technical adaptations and reflections concerning the destructiveness of a single punch reveal that the combat and self-defense aspect in his Karate were never excluded.

As far as Sports-Karate is concerned the picture is not monolithic either: we have a big strand of Karate allowing contact as in Kyokushinkai and no-contact tournaments as held by the JKA (Japan Karate Association) and its offspring. The latter like to claim to practice Budo-Karate and not pure sports. Above all there exist several types of Americanized forms of competitions and MMA (Mixed Martial Arts). The WKF-Karate has its own and different set of rules and should be treated as a distinct brand (therefore I prefer the term Olympic Karate).

Bayer aptly describes the successful commercialization of the JKA-Karate and its expansion over the globe. This Japanized form of Karate I would like to term "Hondo-Karate" (Hondo being Japan's main island) in distinction to the original "Okinawa-Karate". Not only Funakoshi, but also Miyagi Chojun and Mabuni Kenwa, who were active on Hondo in the 1930s had the ambition to get Karate recognized as a genuine Japanese form of "budo". At the time budo was regulated by the Dai-Nippon Butokukai. Karate was perceived as primitive, badly organized, inconsistent, unsystematic, not cultivated and polished, i.e. not "Japanese" enough. It was Konishi Yasuhiro (1893-1983), a Jujutsu-expert and Kendo-teacher who studied Karate under the pioneers in Hondo, who declared: "On the main island Karate was modelled exactly after the image of Kendo and Judo."

In order to get recognized, Karate needed a nomenclature for its techniques and a respective inventory, an etiquette, a uniform, a ranking system and partner training format, all of which was developed by Funakoshi et al. It was Goju-ryu-Karate which was first accepted by the Butokukai in 1933. But it was Shotokan which in the end deviated the most from its Okinawan roots.

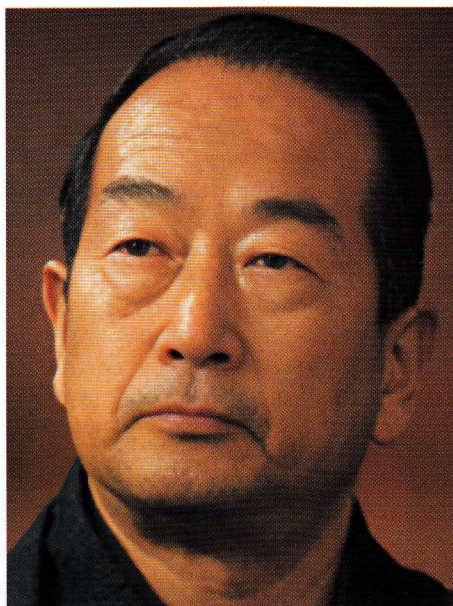
One more aside: the adjective "genuine" in the book's titles insinuates that



*Shigeru Egami founder of the Shotokai.*

there exists a true and a spurious form of Karate. I understand and support Bayer's intention to reclaim the (sub)cultural heritage of Karate as being Okinawan and not Japanese. Karate was propagated as a national sport alongside Judo and Kendo by the instructors who were sent into the world by the JKA. They have extinguished the Okinawan origins of their Karate, but on the other hand enriched it with biomechanical and sports scientific knowledge. Why should a Karate by virtue of being historically older and based on a set of efficacious, deadly skills for self-defense be more "genuine" than one oriented on physical and mental health and self-development, which is a more holistic and cultured human endeavour than pure survival?

There exist different genres of Karate and all of them are legitimate – which of course also goes for Olympic Karate. It is



*Nakayama stressed, "Karate was, foremost, a way of life, a form of Budo."*

on the practitioner to pursue the brand of the art of their choice. And *dojo* and its leaders should make clear, where their main objectives are. You can hardly have everything under the same roof.

Funakoshi opposed to the holding of tournaments and the JKA organized the first one shortly after his demise in 1957. One form of sports-Karate was born. However the JKA and its offspring insisted to adhere to the ideals of Budo and sold Karate as a true national sport of Japan (which it is not). Competition rules dictate the way training is held. Forbidden (but most effective) techniques are not part of the curriculum, but relegated to some Kata, where they turn up.

Self-defence and the functional application of techniques become less relevant. Grappling, choking, throws, armlocks or manipulation of vital points were eliminated, although they have been part and parcel of Okinawan Karate. Karate was thus castrated and made harmless. On the other hand it was infused with Budo-ideals like courtesy, harmony, self-perfection, perseverance, fortitude and spiritual growth. The late Shojiro Koyama, a former JKA-resident in America, declared that sports Karate and Budo as two versions of the art, however very different in approach and "intrinsically contradictory".

In a lengthy talk with Randall G. Hassell, Nakayama Masatoshi, also stressed that Karate was, foremost, a way of life, a method to develop mental strength and a good character and was a form of Budo. As long as the moral orientation and philosophy of Karate and the technical basics were not neglected, tournaments should be no problem.

Between the lines we can read the wariness and reservations in regard to the competitions for which Nakayama and his pals at the JKA have initially designed the rules. The point is seemingly that competition should not become the centre and main concern of the practice of Karate. This is also the gist of the following statement by Kanazawa Hirokazu. I suppose many teachers of Shotokan might concur with him: "Sport is only part of karate. Spiritual, mental and physical training must come first. If people are training correctly in these areas, then participating in tournaments is a good thing. It must be kept in perspective." (SKM Issue 71). I can read some ambivalence, if not schizophrenia, in these utterings.

Once the genie was let out of the bottle, many old school instructors began to fear Karate could go into the wrong direction and winning at competitions would become the exclusive goal for practicing Karate. That is exactly what happened in Olympic Karate, where "sport is not only a part of karate", but everything! Its

rules have further reduced the techniques to straight punches, circular kicks, leg sweeping and takedowns. Protective gear is worn and as many points are collected as possible and they are forked out at the lightest touch ("tagging") of the opponent. Even a tap with the extended fingers instead of a clenched fist is allotted points. Contestants are in constant movement, hopping up and down, zigzagging, ducking and weaving and randomly lashing out. It is a form of light-kickboxing.

Even the performance of Kata in Shotokan-tournaments are affected by the way athletes try to impress the WKF-referees. You can see overdramatization, exaggerated accentuation of slow movements, clipping of techniques to make them look faster, stopping at the pull-back of a *maegeri* in imitation of some Okinawan styles, endless shrieks as a *kiai* and abrupt nodding movements of the head after focussing a technique as if to affirm how powerfully it was performed.

This is *Kabuki*. Stomping instead of sliding (*suri ashi*) has become common and the movements look robotic and mechanical, nice acrobatic shapes with little inner substance. Competitors nowadays specialise either in Kata or Kumite with its rudimentary inventory of point-promising fast, but ineffectual punches and kicks. A purely competition-oriented Karate practice is neither Budo nor self-defense and certainly not what Funakoshi had in his mind.

The competitions in what is now called "traditional" (meaning Japanized Hondo Karate-do), mainly Shotokan Karate of the JKA lineage, are said to be still oriented on the idea of the one decisive blow and points are not as easily awarded as in Olympic Karate. The concept of *ichigeki hissatsu* ("one blow, sure kill") was quite likely introduced into Karate by Asato Anko (one of Funakoshi's teachers) from kenjutsu, the art of sword fighting. Asato and his teacher Matsumura Sokon were accomplished masters of Jigen-ryu, a very straightforward school of swordsmanship revolving around the idea of the single deadly strike.

The fighting style has evolved. Legendary encounters like the one between Kanazawa Hirokazu and Mikami Takayuki in the final of the JKA All-Japan-Championships 1958, which went into several extra times and where almost nothing happened because the two could not find an opening and which ended in a draw, cannot be seen anymore. In fact the way athletes fight in the "traditional" format gets more and more contaminated by the Olympic Karate. I at least know of younger Sports-Karateka, who compete in JKA or SKIF competitions and also in tournaments held by the WKF. They can switch codes and import mannerisms



*Kanazawa (left) and Mikami here in 1962. Their fight in the final of the 1958 JKA Championships ended in a draw, with both declared Joint Champions. This would not happen in today's Sport karate.*

of WKF-Karate into the traditional championships. More and more athletes adopt the sideways kamae and nervous bouncing of Olympic Karate. This leads to a hybridization, also seen in the protective gear adopted for children and teens, who compete in traditional organizations. Parents want to see medals and dojo are ranked by how many champions they produce. Budo is lost on the way. The sportification of Karate is relentlessly gaining ground. Here I share Bayer's apprehensions, who delineates this trend accurately and why Sports-Karate will, "have the highest impact on the view of Karate in the public's eye":

*"Sports-karate is demanded by kids, teens, and adults who are eager to compete. It's demanded by parents as physical, even quasi-therapeutic exercise for their children. It is demanded by karate schools as a way to demonstrate the success of their training and to show off their athletes; and it is demanded by sports officials and their organizations to maintain their job. Sports-karate is, last but not least, the version of the art closest to today's competition-oriented values in market societies."*

Market-mechanisms dictates the budgeting of the dojo, and children have become a major source of income. My fear is that training in Shotokan-Karate and in other styles and schools as well for that matter – is irretrievably watered down. Training has to be playful, not too repetitive, incorporate games and gadgets and even music to keep the kids entertained.

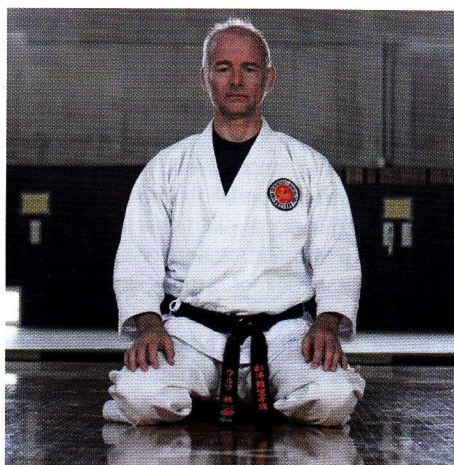
Higher kata are taught and learned before the basic ones are mastered. *Jiyu kumite* is practiced before the children can execute a correct and powerful straight punch and even make a proper fist. The agility, acrobatics and velocity of the techniques of Olympic Karateka is admirable. It is a Karate (minus the do!) based on speed and appearance. An expression or reflection of the TikTok-mentality of our times where spectacular visual effects and quickly changing sensual stimuli set the ever accelerating tone. There is not much "traditional" left here – be it in the sense of Japanized Budo-Karate or vintage Okinawan Karate.

On the other hand there is a strong movement to go back to the roots and retrieve lost knowledge in regard to combat applications of Kata and "original"

bunkai-versions. This has led to an own branch of Karate usually called "practical or applied Karate". Several research societies of practically oriented Karateka and karate-historians have been founded and numerous sites and social media groups on the Internet are devoted to spreading the knowledge of "authentic" methods of Okinawan *karate-jutsu*. The internet, overall globalization and travelling opportunities might and does lead to all kinds of eclectic "patchwork-Karate". A clear cut categorization becomes unfeasible.

Bayer speaks of a possible "synthesis": "*Karate-do* and *karate-jutsu* seem on track to converge to a certain degree, creating the opportunity for both paths to complement each other." Influences go both ways: not a few dojo in Okinawa for instance train in 3-K-fashion (*kihon, kata, kumite*), a concept imported from Hondo-karate. Some dojo are WKF-competition oriented, namely those of the Ryueiryu with its Kata-champions Sakumoto Tsuguo and Kiyuna Ryo.

With the opening of the Okinawa Karate Kaikan in 2017 and the establishment of the Okinawa Karate Information Centre (OKIC) in the same year, Karate is supported and propagated by the Prefecture of Okinawa as its genuine



Author: Dr Wolf Herbert 6th Dan SKIF  
(based in Tokushima, Japan).

cultural heritage. Even tournaments are held (!) and the 25th of October has been declared the "Day of Karate" on which wide scale open street performances are held. This has led to what aptly is called "Karate-tourism" and an analysis of the successful commercialization and sell-out of Karate by the Okinawans would be a rewarding task. The Karate Kaikan has a museum section and hosts a permanent and a temporary exhibition on the history of Karate. It also contains several training facilities which can be rented. The Information Center introduces

dojo, sensei and training sessions for visitors to Okinawa, who are eager to get a short experience of the Okinawan form of Karate, for which they also claim the label "traditional". Most of them do not teach the "jutsu" of the old days to "outsiders". There will always be curators of the ancient way, conservationists, purists, innovators, fashionistas, profit-seekers, impostors and a few real masters – as in every other field of human activity. It is on us to choose whom to follow and what to strive for. The Karate-world is too diverse to dissect and put it neatly into three boxes.

The discussion about what may be called traditional, genuine, practical, authentic etc. will go on and depends on the criteria guiding the respective assessment, be it health benefits, fitness, effectiveness, street fight compatibility, sportiveness, human development and much more. I can only conclude my musings with Funakoshi's wistful poem in allusion to a famous saying in the Analects of Confucius:

"To search for the old  
Is to understand the new.  
This is a matter of time.  
In all things  
man must have a clear mind.  
The Way,  
who passes it on straight and well?"

# SHOTOKAN

## KARATE MAGAZINE

Issue 159  
£3.50  
March 24

THE MAGAZINE FOR ALL SHOTOKAN KARATEKA

