

# THE MATSUYAMA THEORY



AS TOLD BY:

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# WARNING!

**THIS EBOOK MAY CONTAIN  
TRACES OF AWESOME.**

**RECOMMENDED FOR  
KARATE NERDS™\* ONLY.**

**/JESSE**



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\* What is a Karate Nerd™? [I'm glad you asked.](#)

## **BOOM!**

The bungalow door flew open with a bang, as I launched my third vicious roundhouse kick at it.

Success.

*“You can run, but you can’t hiiiide!”* I loudly declared as I marched over the broken bamboo door into the dimly lit room. It was early in the morning, still dark outside.

*“Hah! Finally I’ve found you!”* I yelled as I calmly put my steel nunchucks back in my pocket and reattached the samurai katana on my back.

## **Silence.**

The only sound you could hear was the cicadas in the jungle outside.

*“What the... where is he? My sources clearly said he should be...”*

## **SWOOF!**

My thoughts were suddenly interrupted, as a flash bang went off and white smoke filled the room. I threw myself to the floor with a thud. There was no time to put neither my night vision goggles, nor my ninja gas mask, on.

*“Argh... my eyes! I can’t see! Omigosh, it hurts!”*

After what seemed like an eternity, but probably more like thirty seconds, the smoke finally cleared up. Gradually, my vision started to return.

That’s when I could sense it.

## **A blurry shadow in front of me.**

*“Jesse-san... I have been expecting you...”* a dark voice murmured.

*“W-w... what? Who said that? Is anybody there? Hello!?”* I shouted, wondering if I was hallucinating or not.

## **A part of me knew I wasn’t.**

Slowly I looked up through the lingering smoke, vision still a bit blurry... and that's when I saw him.

Slowly spinning around in his boss' chair, stroking a white cat, there he was.

**Mr. P.**

*Patrick...*

*McCarthy.*

Better known as **sensei McCarthy**, 9<sup>th</sup> dan Koryu Uchinadi Kenpo-jutsu, founder of the International Ryukyu Karate-jutsu Research Society. *Wow.*

As a genuine 5th generation student of the Okinawan fighting arts, with an impeccable lineage of bona-fide instructors (starting with his teacher Kinjo Hiroshi and his teacher's teacher, Hanashiro Chomo, Itosu Ankoh who preceded him, and his master, Matsumura Sokon, —historically the tradition's most visible pioneer), Canadian-born Australian migrant, Patrick McCarthy has

studied the art of Karate since childhood and enjoyed an outstanding competitive background – before embarking upon a lengthy journey as a field-researcher in Japan, where he ultimately resurfaced as a best-selling author of Karate books.

**Some would even call him The Godfather of Karate Research.**

In fact, he's one of those guys that have *forgotten* more about Karate than most of us will ever *learn*.

So, anyway, back to the story.

**Here I was.**

Finally, after 18 months of tirelessly searching around the globe, from the pits of Burma to the deserts of Tibet, I had hunted him down here in his secret tropical bungalow, located on an undisclosed island in the deep Southeast Asian archipelago, where he had relocated to revise his latest [Bubishi](#) (widely acknowledged as the 'Bible

of Karate’) translation. His private yacht parked out front gave him away.

And now he was about to get *me* out of the way.

*“Dammit... you got me good, man...”* I said as I slowly rose to my feet, brushing my shoulders off.

**His cat grinned.**

*“Well, young grasshopper, I knew you were coming. It was just a matter of time. I mean, logically, after your latest attempts to assassinate me at my secret temple in the Chinese mountains, at the Renaissance mansion in Italy, then at the castle in Germany and the ranch in Dallas, not to mention my underwater headquarter in the Dead Sea which you totally blew up, I have been expecting your arrival to this hidden tropical bungalow for a while now.”*

*“Yeah, well, now th... wait. What? Hold on a sec. Assassinate you? What are you talking about? Why would I do that?”* I asked, barely believing what I was hearing.

*“Ummm.... what?”*

**Sensei McCarthy’s eyes lit up.**

*“You mean... you’re not out to get my brain so you can analyze it and extract all the experience of Karate research I’ve collected during my lifetime of travelling the world in order to understand the art of Karate better? No?”*

*“Well, now that you mention it... I mean, NO, not at all! Never! Look, all I want from you is to hear about the Matsu...”*

**“STOP!”**

*“What? I’m just saying that I want to learn about the Matsuya...”*

**“DON’T SAY A WORD!”** sensei McCarthy yells again, pointing at me with his makiwara-hardened fist, eyes filling with panic. *“I know what you’re going to say, but it’s too risky here! You can never speak of this in the open. The secret theory that you*

*want to learn more about of is too powerful for regular Karate people to hear!"*

*I quickly replied: "I know, I know... take it easy. That's why I need to hear it! Now! From you, the source! Or else..."*

*"Or else what?"*

I quickly reach for my holster.

**Empty.**

*"Looking for this?" sensei McCarthy calmly said, a tranquilizer gun suddenly dangling from his pinky finger.*

*"What the... how... when...?"*

*"Don't worry about that now. Come, Jesse-san. Let's talk about this. The time has come."*

*"What? Are you serious? Just like that?"*

**Oh. My. God.**

I was finally going to hear the full story behind the **'Matsuyama Koen Theory'**, an informal (read: *top-secret*) hypothesis shaped by sensei McCarthy based on his lifetime of studying the origins of Karate throughout the world.

The theory was supposed to be quite interesting, yet had for some reason never been officially announced (perhaps because it would severely rock the status quo of the whole Karate world), as it explained everything from *why there is really no right or wrong (or original) Karate left anymore*, to *why we have so many different kata with the same name* and what the *real Chinese connection of Karate and Kung-fu (Quan-fa) is*, along with MUCH more awesome stuff

**This was it!**

He rose from his boss' chair and slowly walked towards me.

*"Look... I will tell you all I know about my secret Karate theory, and you will have the answers to all*

*the questions about Karate you've ever had. How does that sound?"*

*"Awesome!" I said, as he slowly put his arm around me and led me into his closet where a secret elevator was about to take us down to his über secret Underground Karate Laboratory of Breathtakingness™.*

*"Just remember, Jesse-san... you can never, EVER, reveal anything which I am about to tell you today to anyone. Especially not to anybody practicing Karate, because I am afraid their heads would explode. Literally. And if I ever find out that you've put this info together, like into a free eBook or something, and spread it through your super awesome blog, [www.KARATEbyJesse.com](http://www.KARATEbyJesse.com), the consequences could be fatal. For all mankind. I'm talking that doomsday, "Day After Tomorrow"-movie type stuff."*

I looked at sensei McCarthy like it was the surest thing in the world.

*"Duh! Of course, no problem, roger that, I won't tell anybody sir... trust me... heheh..."*

As the elevator doors closed, I slowly reached into my back pocket.

**Bingo!**

**My voice recorder.**

*"Click."*

*Recording...*

**WHAT: NOTES FROM SENSEI PATRICK MCCARTHY'S AND JESSE ENKAMP'S TOP SECRET MEETING ABOUT THE MATSUYAMA KOEN THEORY.**

**WHY: UNDISCLOSED.**

**WHEN: APPROXIMATELY 5 AM, + 8 HRS GREENWICH MEAN TIME (GMT/UTC).**

**LOCATION: SOUTHEAST ASIA, EXACT LOCATION UNKNOWN, SENSEI MCCARTHY'S SECRET UNDERGROUND KARATE LABORATORY OF BREATHTAKINGNESS™.**

### **BEGIN SECRET INTERVIEW:**

**JE [Jesse Enkamp]:** Okay. First of all, to properly understand the *Matsuyama Koen Theory*, I guess a quick history lesson could be in its place. So, could you – judging from your many years of extensive Karate research - very briefly explain how and when Karate started to unfold in the Ryukyu Kingdom (what we today call Okinawa)? Who were the principal (yet pretty unknown) old-

school pioneers, what did they practice, and what were their influences/impact on our Karate today?

**PM [Patrick McCarthy]:** If you don't mind, I'd like to take a moment to first of all actually outline the Matsuyama Koen Theory [MKT] so that we're on the same page, so to speak.

See, in addition to what is commonly known about the history of our art, I believe the following five points (what I call "*base information*") are too often neglected:

**I.** The old expression, "*Karate is Kata - Kata is Karate,*" remains as true today as it was for the pioneers who originally expressed it generations ago.

**II.** The historical origins of Kata [型/形 - Mandarin-Chinese = Xing] rest soundly in Chinese Quanfa [拳法, Kung Fu - Japanese = Kenpo]; and arguably the Shaolin Monastery.



**III.** Local Okinawan enthusiasts clearly understood that [Fujian] China was, "*the desired place*," one received the best instruction in Quanfa during their old Ryukyu Kingdom Period.

**IV.** Those young men most passionate about Quanfa, but unable to travel to China and study at its source, learned directly under local authorities in Kume Village [久米村]; a district regarded as the center of Chinese community in Naha (the modern 'capital' of Okinawa).

**V.** The empty-handed [and one-against-one] acts of physical violence, against which prescribed self-defense responses are geared [lessons culminated in Kata], are common amidst human behaviour and not limited by culture, race, gender or time.

### **OKINAWA'S OLD CHINESE COMMUNITY**

During much of the old Ryukyu Kingdom Period [1392-1879] the majority of Okinawa's Chinese community resided in Naha's Kumemura district

[aka Kuninda]. In those days there was a magnificent park [now known as Matsuyama Koen] located between Naminoue Beach and what is now Fukushuen Garden.

Much of the Chinese community gathered there to enjoy various cultural activities throughout the year... and amidst the many cultural activities was the practice of Quanfa by local enthusiasts. With much of the Chinese community being directly from Fujian Province it's not surprising to learn that most of the Quanfa was southern-style, and largely Fujian-based.

**JE:** So, Okinawan youngsters gathered here, at this notorious Matsuyama park, to do some trendy Kung Fu fighting? This then formed the base for popularizing the fighting arts in Okinawa? Basically? Or?

**PM:** Well, as Quanfa was not native to Okinawa, local Chinese learned, practiced and taught what had been handed down within their family or community for generations.



Experts who travelled between China and the tiny island kingdom periodically influenced local sources and existing practices.

In fact, visiting military officials, posted to Shuri Castle and the Chinese Embassy, body guards and security personnel; they all served to inspire local Chinese enthusiasts over time.

Even though the Ryukyu Kingdom was abolished in 1879, and official Chinese scholars, bureaucrats, and diplomats returned to China in the years preceding its formal annexation to Japan, the idea of local enthusiasts gathering to train in the park continued on with the subsequent generation of local enthusiasts; despite the growing anti-Chinese sentiment that consumed that era.

Such gatherings brought together enthusiasts who not only drew upon existing Quanfa knowledge but were equally inclined to experiment with different practices in an effort to keep the art alive and improve their understanding of it.

**JE:** You mean...

**PM:** That while still firmly rooted in Southern-style Quanfa, an innovative and eclectic approach to practicing the art gradually emerged reflecting a flavour and rhythm unique to Matsuyama Koen.

**JE:** Whoah. So, let me get this straight: much of what we today know as old-school Karate was basically cooked up in, and around, Matsuyama park, as it was a natural meeting place for Chinese experts wishing to practice their native fighting art and enthusiastic Okinawan youngsters wishing to learn stuff?

**PM:** Indeed I believe these embryonic circumstances cradled the birth of many famous Kata such as Suparinpei, Sanseru, Seisan, Kururunfa, and Seipai, etc.. In spite of Sanchin-like practices, which are commonly found in many southern Quanfa styles, and in spite of locating different Kata [型/形 - Xing] that use identical names [i.e., Seisan/13, Seipai/18, Sanseru/36 and

Suparinpei/108, etc.], the said Kata are not practiced or taught in any southern Quanfa style, nor has anyone to date been able to locate such practices!

**JE:** Ironic, isn't it?

**PM:** However, not being able to locate these Kata in China doesn't mean that we cannot find pretty much identical smaller *templates* [#1] in many Southern-based Quanfa styles [i.e., Yongchun, Southern Praying Mantis and Monk Fist Boxing, etc.].

Indeed, we most certainly can and have.

A few of those late 19th century *Fujian-Chinese* whose imprint is most deeply entrenched in this local cultural heritage were Ason, Wai Xinxian and Iwah along with Wu Xianhui and Tang Daiji, who subsequently followed in the early part of the 20th century. Some of the most familiar *local* names from that time and place included Aragaki Seisho, Kojo Taitei, Higaonna Kanryo, Maezato Ranpo,

Matsuda Tokusaburo, Norisato Nakaima and Sakiyama Kitoku, etc.

(Footnote #1. Part of my HAPV/2-person drill theory supposes that Kata are the result of pioneers linking together prescribed application concepts [i.e., "templates"] into solo-routines as creative mechanisms through which to express individual prowess while strengthening one's overall mental, physical and holistic conditioning.)

**JE:** Hold up. This is really good stuff, but what's that thing you always say? You know, that saying.

**PM:** You mean "*What some people take for granted is a mystery to others.*"? Good idea. So at the risk of taking too much for granted, let me include some additional information hoping that it might support the overall delivery of this presentation while trying not to bore the death out of those already familiar with what I call "*Common Knowledge.*"

## THE 3K'S OF MODERN KARATE; KIHON, KUMITE & KATA

In spite of the lip-service paid to, "*practical self-defense*", much of what modern Karate represents these days surrounds three fundamental themes:

- First, are the **Kihon-waza** [基本技/basic technique] which serve as fundamental pillars of its foundation and were actually developed in the 1920's and 30's. The concept of "basics" as we know them today did not exist prior to this.
- Next is the competitive fighting format called, **Kumite** [組手]; a pre-war sport established on Japan's mainland and based largely upon scoring victory through percussive-impact.
- Finally are the stylised solo-practices called, **Kata** [型/形], many of which date back to pre-1900 Okinawa.

In spite of having produced some wonderfully talented competitive athletes, these three fundamental themes of modern Karate [Kihon, Kumite & Kata] are fundamentally flawed when addressing the art's original defensive outcomes, in that they're *rule-bound*!

When addressing realistic "self-defense," we must not forget that actual physical violence is brutal, terribly unpredictable and not governed by rules of any kind. Moreover, it entails all kinds of aspects [ground, clinch, tackles, etc.], which are simply too often neglected in traditional Karate.

Regrettably, much of Karate's traditional self-defense practices reflect a mindset dominated by impractical attack scenarios, rules and compliant training partners. Together with the common lack of aggressive resistance (in training), such "*self-defense practices*" remain incongruous.



**JE:** So true. Things are not what they used to be...  
By the way, just for the record, how far back does Karate actually date? If one can even answer that!?

**PM:** I'll try my best.

### **TE/TI [手/HAND/S] - OKINAWA'S EMPTY-HAND FIGHTING ART**

Beyond vague anecdotal reference, citing the origin of this art, *"in China,"* there is very little reliable historical documentation to accurately trace, what can only be assumed to be, a haphazard history of Karate. The earliest description of an empty-hand fighting art comes to us from a Confucian scholar, named Junsoku [程順則 1663-1734].

Junsoku was such an advocate of this art he became known as "Te" Junsoku. Often referred to as, *"The Sage of Nago,"* and *"Father Educator,"* Junsoku was an important government official during Okinawa's old Ryukyu Kingdom period. In

1683, he wrote, *"No matter how you may excel in the art of Te [手/using one's hands], and in your scholastic endeavours, nothing is more important than your behaviour and humanity as observed in daily life."*

While we are not sure about the actual origin of the term, "Te" [meaning "hand/hands," and also pronounced "Di" and "Ti", or "Ti'gwa"], its intended meaning is not difficult to decipher especially given the nature of the art; in fact, judging by the time frames, and geographical location, the term is typically befitting the abstract nature of Eastern thought. So too is the "Bunbu" [文武/Pen & Sword] concept, of balancing physical training with scholarly study to nurture character development typically indicative of this time-honoured mindset.

However one chooses to look at it, Junsoku's 17th century use of the term, "Te," sets the historical precedent with which the empty-handed fighting art would be identified for generations to come.



No less interesting is to acknowledge how such a simple point can be so significant, as it is here with this term, date, historical figure and desired purpose that we are able to locate a basis from which to understand the nature of this art.

**JE:** I fully agree. So, since we're on the subject, could you elaborate for a sec on the etymology of "Karate"? There's so many terms floating around the history of Karate, like you mention; "Te", "Ti", "Di", "Toudi", "-jutsu", "-do" ...?

**PM:** Sure thing.

### **ROOT-WORD, PREFIXES & SUFFIXES**

For those of us who don't know much about grammar, a root is the part of a word that contains its basic meaning or definition. A prefix is a word element placed in front of the root, which changes the word's meaning or makes a new word. A suffix is a word element placed after the root, which changes the word's meaning as well as its function.

I mention this here because two distinct prefixes [Tou-唐 & Kara-空] and two unique suffixes [jutsu-術 & do-道] have brought both meaning and confusion to the root word "Te" [手]. Let's look at them now.

### **"TE" – ITS TWO PREFIXES & TWO SUFFIXES**

There are two commonly accepted ways of writing Karate in Japanese [i.e., Chinese script]:

**Example #1**, is like this 唐手術 and pronounced Tote-jutsu/Toudi-jutsu or Karate-jutsu: It was commonly used in Okinawa before WW2, and on the mainland up until the early 1930's.

**Example #2**, is like this 空手道 and pronounced Karate-do: This became the modern name established by the Japanese in 1933, a name which was later adopted by the Okinawans in 1936.



Please note that each example consists of three separate Chinese characters:

- **Example #1** 唐手術
- **Example #2** 空手道

## EXPLANATION OF EXAMPLE 1

**The first character** of example #1 [唐], literally means Tang [i.e., the Chinese dynasty 618-907], and was once the common way Japanese [and Ryukyuan/Okinawan/Uchinanchu] people referred to China, and or to describe certain things Chinese; i.e., as a prefix.

In spite of one theory suggesting "Te" is little more than old-style Siamese Boxing as it evolved in Okinawa[#2], the Tang prefix is believed to represent the source of origin for "Te" [i.e., Tang-Period China/618-907AD]. Tang is pronounced Tou and or Kara in Japanese; as in Kara-te and or Tou-te/Tou-di. As a matter of interest, this is also

the same Chinese character used to describe the Korean fighting art, Tang Soo Do/唐手道

(Footnote #2. See article here:  
<http://tiny.cc/t6kx6>)

**The second character**, in both examples [手], means "hand" or "hands," and as previously defined, represents an old way local people once described the empty-hand art of fighting during the Ryukyu Kingdom Period. There is argument over whether the old term simply referred to using the fists [for fighting] or was it a collective term used to describe all aspects of the empty-handed art; i.e., striking, kata, wrestling, etc.

Either way, the character can be pronounced "Te" in Japanese, and "Di" and or "Ti" in Uchina Guchi, [i.e., the Ryukyu language].

**The third character**, in example #1 [術], means technique, or better yet, *"practical art"*. Although mistakenly written/pronounced as "jitsu" ["day"!],

the character is actually written/pronounced jutsu, in Japanese. When contrasted with its modern counterpart, "do/道," jutsu-based arts tend to focus more on functional application than they do on, *"character development."*

While this way of writing Karate-jutsu [唐手術 /also "Toute-jutsu" & "Toudi-jutsu"] may, in fact, date back before the time of Matsumura Sokon [1809-1899], to the best of our knowledge, it first appeared in the Oct 1908 writings of his student, Itosu Ankoh [1832-1915].

## EXPLANATION OF EXAMPLE II

**The first character**, [空], of example #2, the modern way of writing Karate, means empty and was first found in Hanashiro Chomo's [1869-1945] 1905 publication, *"Karate Kumite"* [空手組手 /"Fighting with the Empty Hands"], though it was not established as an official name to describe this tradition until Dec 1933, when the Dai Nippon Butokukai [大日本武徳会] sanctioned it to

describe the art as an addition to modern Japanese Budo [武道- judo, - kendo, - aikido, etc.].

**The second character** has already been defined [see above].

**The 3rd character** of example #2 [道] means 'way', 'path', 'route', or more loosely even, 'doctrine' or 'principle.' Based upon the Chinese philosophy of Tao [Dao/道], it is a metaphysical concept signifying the primordial essence or fundamental nature of the universe.

Allow me to elaborate:

## THE TAO [道/ MICHI - THE WAY]

Widely adopted by Confucian thought and Zen Buddhism, the Tao had a profound influence upon every aspect of Chinese culture, which in turn profoundly influenced the spiritual mindset of its closest neighbours; e.g. SE Asia, Korea and Japan. As the spiritual essence of the Tao is abstract, and

difficult to accurately define, it became the perfect vehicle with which to help ambitious Japanese leaders, emerging from the dark ages of feudalism, achieve their political agenda.

Under the guise of restoring the Emperor and replacing, "*evil customs*" with the "*just laws of nature*," a revisionist government unreservedly promoted its spiritual beliefs, distorted ideas of virtue [徳] and proper social behavior. During the late 19th and early years of the 20th century [Japan's radical period of military escalation], revisionist leaders distorted the spiritual beliefs of [Zen] Buddhism and redefined Shinto [神道] practices to fit their political agenda.

This resulted in establishing Shinto as the state religion, and restoring god-like status to the Emperor, which also became inextricably linked to the cause of Japanese Nationalism: *Kokutai* [National Polity] *Shushin* [moral education] and *Nihonjinron* [Japanese uniqueness].

On the surface few Japanese questioned what lofty inner-rewards were obtainable through its pursuit, however, and to the best of my knowledge, the spirit of this transformation remains largely undefined in its rightful historical context, as it pertains to the development of Budo, of which Karatedo is an integral part.

In spite of the wonderfully revised charter outlining the philosophical premise of Budo today, I'm confident that knowing something of its history will go a long way in helping learners better understand how and why its distorted concepts altered both the original practice and purpose of our tradition.

Based on this, I'd like to provide a glimpse into the political circumstances out of which modern Karate evolved.

**JE:** Wait, let me just throw in another one of my awesome illustrations of Matsuyama Koen first!



**PM:** Great. Now, emerging from Feudalism, the idea of "officially" revising its abstract spiritual concepts and fusing them with the practice of the warrior arts promoted the national goals of peace, balance and living in harmony with nature. No longer possessing a warrior class, the newly formed government had its own ideas about building a strong military force.

As revisionists laid the foundation for the new Empire of Japan, the idea of transforming its warrior arts into safe practices, for the purpose of being used in the school system, was eagerly embraced. Supported by an ambitious military-orientated government, the "Michi/Way" [道] concept served as an ideal conduit through which to funnel physical fitness and social conformity. Hence, the domestic source from which would emerge an endless flow of strong conscripts with a dauntless fighting spirit.

Supporting this was clever military propaganda, which likened Budo [武道] to its predecessor

Bushido [武士道] and described the practice as, *"The way common men built uncommon bravery."*

Described as "Wa" [和], the central concepts of peace, balance and living in harmony with nature were unreservedly embraced by post-Edo Period Japanese. In support of building the Empire of Japan, supporters were expected to demonstrate a continual readiness to sacrifice personal interests for the sake of communal tranquillity. No better tactics were ever required to inspire an entire nation.

The conformist-based culture now had a clearly defined path upon which to follow *"the Way!"* Kokutai (National Polity) and the precepts of Shushin [moral education] represented diligence, regimentalism, conformism, the commitment to mass productivity, strict adherence to seniority, Emperor worship and lifetime loyalty to one's organization [or business], all of which perpetuated the Nihonjinron [Japanese uniqueness] myth.



**JE:** Wait... that sounds almost like some ~~communi~~... umm... Karate dojos I know of!

**PM:** Indeed it has been said that Budo is a microcosm of the Japanese culture from which it comes... a miniature representation of its beliefs, customs and social behaviour. Budo traces its origins to the traditions of Bushido and incorporates the precepts of Zen Buddhism. It encourages discipline, introspection, character development, and a sense of moral ethics so that its participants may contribute to social prosperity and harmony, and ultimately benefit society.

Respect, courtesy and self-control are highly valued traits in the practice of Budo [武道], and its individual arts, are but pathways upon which this philosophy can be learned and taught and Karatedo is but one of nine modern Japanese fighting arts; It is sometimes described as one part of a larger whole, with the other eight parts being Judo/柔道, Kendo/剣道 [Iaido/居合道 & Jodo/杖道], Aikido/合気道, Kyudo/弓道, Naginatado/薙刀

道, Jukendo/銃剣道, Sumo/相撲 and Shorinji Kenpo/少林持拳法.

Oh, and in case you thought the martial arts were alone in this, think again. Below are some of the many conduits through which post feudal/pre-war social conformity was funnelled.

- Bushido (武士道), the Way of the warrior
- Shinto (神道), the Way of the gods; Japan's native religion
- Budo (武道), the modern warrior Way
- Shodo (書道), the Way of writing
- Chado (茶道), or sado, or chanoyu, the Way of tea ceremony
- Kado (華道) or Ikebana, the Way of flower arrangement

**JE:** Okay, I got it. I used to learn some Shodo when I was living in Okinawa (harder than it looks)! But anyway, that was Japan. So what about Okinawa?

The 'birthplace' of it all?

**PM:** First of all, if we're using the term Karate generically [i.e., representing the empty-handed fighting arts in general], and we all agree that its *roots* lay in China, then there's every reason to believe that it/they have been taught ever since the Chinese arrived in the Ryukyu Kingdom during the late 14th century.

### **PARTS OF A LARGER WHOLE**

In spite of the seemingly boundless divides Karate crosses today, it's important to understand that when the art was originally introduced from the tiny rural island of Okinawa to the mainland of Japan in the early 1920's, it was little more than a haphazard collection of overly ritualized solo-practices; the point being, it did not represent the art in its entirety but rather one part of a larger whole.

**JE:** Whoah... wait. You mean the Okinawans never got the 'full memo'?

**PM:** Here's how I see the individual parts of a larger whole:

**TEGUMI:** [手組] was originally a form of grappling dating back to the time of Tametomo [11th century Japan]. The discipline is believed to have been originally derived from Chinese Wrestling [Jiao Li/角力 from which comes Shuai Jiao/摔角 - new name est. 1928] and evolved into a unique form of wrestling before finally became a rule-bound sport called Ryukyu/Okinawan Sumo.

**TORITE:** [Chin Na/Qinna/擒拿 in Mandarin Chinese] is the Chinese Shaolin-based method of seizing and restraining an opponent. Once vigorously embraced by law enforcement officials, security agencies and correctional officers during Okinawa's old Ryukyu Kingdom Period, the solo re-enactment of this practice can be found in Kata.

**KATA:** [Hsing/Xing 型/形 in Mandarin Chinese], in spite of its vigorous local cultivation during Okinawa's old Ryukyu Kingdom Period, are solo

fighting routines which trace their origins back to [Fujian] Chinese Quanfa [拳法]; e.g. Yongchun Crane Boxing, Monk Fist and Southern Praying Mantis styles, etc. Used as forms of human movement, and unique ways of personal training, they were popularized by the Chinese as ways of promoting physical fitness, mental conditioning and holistic well-being.

**T'GWAW:** [手小] was Okinawa's plebeian form of percussive impact – aka "Te," "Ti," "Di" [手, again meaning hand/s] or Okinawa-te and Uchinadi. It was an art that depended principally upon the use of clenched fists to strike an opponent [in contrast to the open hand method preferred by Chinese arts, according to both Kyan Chotoku & Miyagi Chojun] although the head, feet, shins, elbows and knees were also favoured, [as we see in a lot of Kata applications – or "bunkai"].

**JE:** So let me get this straight: Are you're implying that some of the people who laid the foundation of old-school Karate were in fact... open minded?

That they were mixing and matching different techniques and 'styles' to form their own, personal, uniquely tailored martial art? Whatever happened to that mentality?! Has this got something to do with the later Japanization of Karate (into Karate-do: The "Way" of Karate) as previously mentioned?

**PM:** If you're asking me whether or not the Okinawans customarily hosted open seminars during the old-days by inviting in unknown instructors from various fighting arts to enjoy healthy doses of cross-training, my answer is, "no!".

However, the idea of peers [douhai/同輩] sharing amidst each other, and or one instructor recommending his student to learn a specific competency, and or to study directly under another local teacher, especially after he'd brought him as far as he could, then I say, "yes," as such a practice was very common during the old-days.





**JE:** But, that means a teacher openly admitted that his understanding of the art was actually not the “be-all and end-all”!

**PM:** True. The close-minded and over-protective mentality so widespread today is typically associated with the business aspect of the tradition. It's all about a preference for exclusivity, control and profit. While the Japanese certainly don't possess a monopoly on this mindset, and inherent insecurities certainly have something to do with it too, most point their fingers towards the JKA [Japan Karate Association] for having set such precedence and the conceit associated with believing one style is superior to another.

Here's the thing: Tradition has never been about blindly following the men of old, or preserving their ashes in a box, but rather in keeping the flame of their spirit alight and continuing to seek out what they sought - in the effort to keep the art alive and functional.

This is the true message of the pioneers.

**JE:** Word. That's totally what my blog is all about. So, anyway, now that we know a bit more about *why* and *what* was practiced in both Japan and Okinawa, let's break it down for a sec: Today we have things like online forums, organized training camps, big federations, websites, tournaments etc for anyone who wishes to share, learn and impart knowledge about Karate in an easy manner... but that was certainly not the case at the time when Karate was “born” in Okinawa, right?

In other words, we know that Karate eventually spread to Japan, and subsequently to the rest of the world, but how did Karate spread *within* the organic Okinawan community to begin with? I mean, surely you couldn't just walk into any strip-mall McDojo, like today?!

**PM:** For the most part the art of self-defense was taught and learned in relative secrecy during Okinawa's old Ryukyu Kingdom period; As a rule, it was usually imparted father to son, or someone known, respected and trusted by the family to

instruct the son by way of recommendation or invitation [i.e., from the uncle, grandfather, neighbor, etc.].

Even then, it was customarily only taught to the 1st-born son [although I don't know how true that actually was]. It's important to understand that the art was nowhere near as well known, popular or enthusiastically sought after as it is today. In fact, while I'm confident that most locals probably knew of or about it, and possibly even who were the neighborhood experts, the idea of it being taught publicly, or even outside the family circle, was rare.

The art of Karate as we understand it today was simply not known during that time. Let me repeat something my 94-year old Okinawan teacher, Kinjo Hiroshi [widely respected in Japan as a one of the leading historians of Karate], has told me over the years about the art. *"No one was more surprised than were we Okinawans to see Karate*

*become the worldwide phenomenon it has become today... it is simply incredible,"* says the Master.

**JE:** And that's why he's in [The Karate Code](#)! So, shameless plugs aside, going back to the infamous Matsuyama Koen, our theoretical 'place to be' in Okinawa during the old Ryukyu Kingdom; this explains quite a lot about Karate in general, and kata in specific. In fact, doesn't the Matsuyama theory explain pretty nicely why the exact same pattern of movements, also known as self-defense templates (or "bunkai" if so wish) frequently appear in old-school kata after kata, as if all forms are somehow "related" way back?

I mean, if you take any fairly advanced kata and simply rearrange the pattern slightly, change the line of performance (embusen) a little, personalize some small details, and, you know, just generally change the kata very superficially – still keeping all of the main ideas and intents of each set of movements intact – isn't most kata just a collection of pretty much the same old principal

defensive templates? It's almost as if there was a bunch of commonly practiced self-defense templates that the old masters would know about, and when they felt like practicing and/or teaching a couple of these they would just string them together into a longer set ('kata'), which could look different each time depending on what set of self-defense templates ('bunkai') they felt like practicing that day! The apparent link here to your famous HAPV [the study of the Habitual Acts of Physical Violence] theory is interesting, isn't it?

**PM:** Is there an echo in here? :-)

**JE:** Wait... again, just to clarify: you mean this is one of the main reasons to why we have so many versions of the "same" kata floating around, right? I mean, if we look past the numerous (obviously modern) tournament versions, that is.

**PM:** Here's something to think about: Imagine being part of a conformist-based culture where great emphasis was placed upon tradition, filial piety, not questioning authority and communal

tranquility. Some "ancient" teachings are then handed down to you from an authority figure and you are told that it must never be changed and that the meaning[s] will become intuitively obvious with time/practice. You have no contextual premise [i.e., HAPV] upon which to conduct an analysis, only that it's about fighting and you're learning in a rule-bound environment, with compliant opponents, in spite of being pushed the odd time in sparring sessions [basically mock combat]. The accepted norm is also to apply everything to a reverse punch and/or a front kick! Got that?

Okay, great, hold that thought for a moment.

Now, I want you to consider the source from which the so-called "*ancient teachings*" were actually imparted: For this exercise may I ask you to think about the many "experts," black belt instructors, and other enthusiasts you know and their level of experience, understanding and competency? I'd also like you to think about from

whom they learned and under what circumstances and for how long, etc.

See what I'm getting at?

Now, let's go back for a moment to the original issue of trying to figure out why we have so many versions of the same kata and grasp the nature of this continuum.

Pretty simple, isn't it?

**JE:** My head hurts! Okay, so there are some pretty obvious conclusions anyone with a functioning brain can draw from this discussion: Like, we'll never find an complete and "original" secret Karate kata in China. We'll never find the hidden identical twin to Karate's famous kata like Bassai, Kusanku, Seisan, or Suparinpei hidden away in some ancient Chinese village. Yet so many famous researchers (for some reason Goju-ryu springs to mind) insist on going to China again and again - in search for the "*holy grail*" of Karate - trying desperately to find a master sifu (sensei) who

knows a hsing/xing/quan (kata) which looks *exactly* like their Karate does! But the Matsuyama Koen Theory basically states that they're pretty much wasting their time and money, aren't they?

**PM:** Well, that is not 100% true, as little compares with the rewards of actually traveling to China. The experience of being there in person for research, with the ability of being able to communicate [as you would in your own language] with local authorities, and cross-training with different styles, delivers wonderfully penetrating insight... especially when you know what to look for [and have the eyes to see]. As I've already mentioned earlier, you can still locate Southern-styles which use "*Sanchin-like*" practices and plenty of different solo-templates (sets of combinations of techniques) identical to those commonly found in old Okinawan Karate kata.

Also, you should know that another theory maintains that progenitor Fujian-Chinese Quanfa styles, from which the ancestral kata of old-school

Okinawa Karate trace their origins, either no longer exist, continued to evolve or have been swallowed up by other styles.

**JE:** Man, I have to tell you, the Matsuyama Koen Theory, along with your renowned HAPV theory (and of course your perhaps less well-known McCarthy's 10 Point Observation on Kata) really ties together and paints a vividly clear picture of the whole theory and history behind the enigma of Karate and it's previously pretty *"unfathomable"* evolution. Add that to your insane amount of truly remarkable Karate articles (yes, every single one of them) and your multitude of ground-breaking books and original translations over the years, and Karate suddenly seems a bit more... well, I'm not sure *"understandable"* is the right word, but at least fascinating!

**PM:** Yes, but what would I know... I'm not Okinawan?! Jesse-san, when I think about the enigma surrounding Karate and how it was meant to be understood I am always reminded of the

Chinese proverb associated with its study; *"There are many paths to the top of the mountain, but the view is always the same"* - 上山的路有很多，但风景都是一样的. This timeless message suggests that irrespective of the path travelled, the destination is the same for us all... and yet, judging by the political propaganda pitting one style against the other, it would appear as if equanimity escapes some of us.

Irrespective of style, Karate is a pathway. It's a form of physical expression...a mechanism about understanding oneself, life and the world in which we dwell.

In my opinion, the conceptual themes of this art transcend culture, race, gender and time. Liking it to the proverbial "path," the further along it one travels the deeper within one gets, until it becomes evident that it's not really about a destination at all... but rather, the journey!

**JE:** Wow... that's some deep stuff. Reminds me of what you wrote for [The Karate Code](#).

Now, lastly, to wrap things up, do you have any more thoughts on the Matsuyama Koen Theory in general, or common misunderstandings of Karate in specific (which I know you work on clearing up daily!), that more people should know about?

**PM:** I do... but perhaps we'll leave those for our next project ";-)

**JE:** Sounds like a plan! ;)

*And with those words I unexpectedly let off a loud "COWABUNGA SUCKERS!", as I threw my hidden smoke grenade on the floor, judo chopped fifteen guards, roundhouse kicked eighteen killer ninja squad midgets, "BANG!", dive rolled out of the window, "SMASH!", and landed perfectly on top of my new \$150 000 000 state of the art stealth chopper in a impeccable crane stance. "Up, up and away, Albert! I got what we came for!" I gloriously yelled as my servant Albert Finckelbeertz swiftly steered us away towards the sunset.*

*Mission accomplished.*

**THE END.**







## ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

### JESSE ENKAMP

...is the instigator behind [KARATEbyjesse.com](http://KARATEbyjesse.com), director of a reportedly amazing [YouTube channel](#), best-selling author of several books (incl. '[The Karate Code](#)' and more), designer of [hilarious Karate t-shirts](#) and just a generally bewilderingly handsome ninja renegade Karate Nerd™ who loves carrot cake. Oh, and yesterday he deadlifted 410+ pounds. *Booya!*

**RIGHT NOW** he's just finished creating the [FREE 7-Day Karate Nerd™ E-mail Guide](#), while working on engineering the "perfect" Karate gi for his new startup company ([Seishin](#)), apart from training, teaching, and writing informative Karate articles every week or so. Stay in touch with Jesse on Twitter (@karatebyjesse) or [Facebook](#).

### PATRICK MCCARTHY

...is widely considered the world's leading Karate historian and researcher to date, with his most famous titles including the translation of the legendary '[Bubishi](#)', Funakoshi's 'Tanpenshu' and Motobu's 'Watashi no Karatejutsu'. On his mythical "spare time", apart from recording instructional Karate vids, sensei McCarthy travels the world to spread [Koryu Uchinadi Kenpo-jutsu](#), established as *"a pragmatic alternative to the plethora of terribly ambiguous and highly dysfunctional styles of "traditional" Karate"*.

**RIGHT NOW** he's working on his forthcoming book, 'Legend of the Fist', as well as developing an updated online learning environment for his numerous followers and members of the [IRKRS](#) (International Ryukyu Karate Research Society). But don't tell anyone, it's not done yet.

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