

# The practical development of karate in the mirror of history

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The karate that is familiar to most of us is the one with an athletic and competitive nature, or the one in the context of simple self-defense relevant to our time and environment. In the context of combat, martial arts in general including karate, have undergone a significant transformation. Over time, the pragmatic combat motif was replaced by other fields to meet time and environmental requirements. In many cases the aesthetic motif replaces the combative mean. We even made it wise to harness karate for various therapeutic needs in areas such as motor difficulties, ADHD and more. Yet classic Okinawan karate that focuses on producing power and personal empowerment is less common and lesser known. Even more than that, karate's roots lie in the period before the 19th cen-

tury, in which karate developed for professional security demands in government service.

We often tend to perceive and analyze things from our contemporary point of view that matches our environment. Tracking the roots and development requires us to take an objective and open approach.

In the context of combat, martial arts in general including karate, have undergone a significant transformation. For example, rules were conducted in the competition arena for both reasons, to prevent damage and to allow judgment. Adjustments were made in the therapeutic field. The techniques were adapted to the new goals and frameworks created in the modern era.

As mentioned, the roots of karate, its development and its use prior the 19th century, lie

within the official security arena, personal security, guarding sensitive places and accomplishing special missions such as securing diplomatic and merchant ships and diplomatic delegations.

Clues to these techniques are found in earlier kata(s) such as Kushanku (Kusanku), Passai (Bassai) and Useishi (Gojushiho).

The transition to clenched fists as a dominant means occurred in the second circle of karate's environment, that is the civilian one at the end of the 19th century onwards.

The use of blocking or launching a punch is most common today. However, we identify grappling elements that belong to tactical and operational combat, and their value usually fades over time. An example is the use of joint locks, wrestling and Kaishu (開手) (open hands), which was more dominant in earlier kata(s). Another approach offers action at a group level that requires teamwork cooperation. Other security scenarios may inquire individual level not as prevalent street fighting or simple self-defense, but for professional official security mission.

These technical and tactical components tend to lose their value over the years due to changing environment and goals.



In Passai-kata, two Tsuki (Morote-tsuki) are launched simultaneously with the back slightly bent. Operative course of action offers a personal security staff pushes a potential attacker towards his colleague, and from there to outside the sterile area. Of course, this approach can also be used as self-defense in the civil circle, for example as a release from a grip or a choke.

Useishi-kata (Gojushiho), begins with a kneeling movement and a “defensive technique”. A deeper investigation at the operational level related to the historical context reveals an action of taking over an aggressor while immediately lowering him to the ground.

Kata is a template in which knowledge, principles and ideas assemble to compound content for practice as well as pass it on.

Therefore, the questions that arise regarding the effectiveness and relevance of the techniques or kata, will receive logical and clear answers, and moreover, operative answers. These answers depend on the environment and past purpose of the technique. At this point we will be able to delegate the concept of the technique to the current arena.



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