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**Universitat Autònoma  
de Barcelona**

Programa de Doctorat en Traducció i Estudis Interculturals  
Departament de Traducció i d'Interpretació i d'Estudis de l'Àsia Oriental

TESIS DOCTORAL

# **La conformación del karate de Okinawa entre la tradición y la modernidad**

**Una aproximación a los procesos interculturales en el contexto de la  
globalización**

Eduardo González de la Fuente

Directores de tesis:

Dr. Blai Guarné Cabello

Dr. Gustavo Pita Céspedes

Tutor de la tesis

Dr. Blai Guarné Cabello

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona 2020







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*Qu'est-ce qui caractérise une civilisation ?*

*Est-ce l'exceptionnel génie ?*

*Non ; c'est la vie de tous les jours...*

*La planète des singes (1963),*

**Pierre Bouille.**





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## Resumen

El karate es una de las artes marciales más famosas del mundo, y uno de los principales iconos culturales incorporados desde Japón a la cultura global. En términos históricos, el boom internacional del karate, iniciado en los años 60, precede al interés global por otras manifestaciones de la cultura popular japonesa como el sushi, el anime, el manga o el J-pop. Asimismo, el poder simbólico del karate se expresa no únicamente a través de las prácticas marciales y/o deportivas, sino también mediante una extensa gama de productos de consumo como películas, revistas, libros, videojuegos o juguetes entre otros muchos bienes ampliamente diseminados a escala global. A pesar de su imagen de tradición, largamente difundida como insignia de la esencia japonesa y sus prácticas culturales, el karate ha protagonizado, y continúa haciéndolo, un complejo proceso histórico de resignificación de sus formas y referentes de acuerdo con el contexto y los condicionantes del momento. En especial durante el siglo XX factores políticos, económicos y culturales han moldeado las narrativas y prácticas discursivas que se han ido asociado por concatenación al karate, recreando, matizando o desmintiendo lecturas previas acerca de su manifestación como expresión cultural. Analizadas en su conjunto la reproducción y diseminación de dichos discursos representacionales del karate componen una miscelánea notablemente heterogénea que, a diferencia de interpretaciones reduccionistas considerablemente divulgadas, evidencia la enorme diversidad interna, pasada y presente, de su manifestación cultural. Lo que en última instancia da cuenta de la pluralidad constitutiva de la cultura y la sociedad japonesa.

El karate, comúnmente considerado como un antiguo arte marcial japonés, tiene su origen en Okinawa, región que hasta 1879 formaba un estado independiente de Japón. Este hecho conlleva disputas en cuanto a la definición y estatus del karate dentro del cuerpo de *budō*, lo que refleja la naturaleza periférica de Okinawa y la complejidad de su integración moderna en Japón. En todo caso es necesario señalar cómo, en numerosas ocasiones, la conciencia del origen okinawense del karate y de las peculiaridades culturales de la región producen un efecto de deslegitimación, en base al cual se niega la facultad del arte marcial Okinawense para representar la cultura y las artes marciales japonesas.



Esta tesis persigue deliberadamente enfrentar de manera crítica tales polaridades, que más que coadyuvar, ofuscan la comprensión del fenómeno a través tanto de la reificación de estereotipos esencialistas como de supuestas autenticidades, que niegan la riqueza de los factores que han ido estimulando la historia cultural del karate, terminando por reforzar jerarquías culturales, discriminaciones étnicas, y dominaciones de clase y estatus tanto dentro como fuera de Japón. En este sentido, la hipótesis que sostiene esta investigación es que el karate okinawense constituye una manifestación intercultural que ha cultivado un uso complejo de la adaptación y la resignificación de múltiples prácticas e imaginarios resultantes de la relación entre Okinawa y Japón, especialmente en el contexto de la modernidad y de manera acelerada en el actual escenario de la globalización. Es justamente esta plasticidad la que integra el karate en mecanismos sociohistóricos y culturales de largo alcance, cuyo estudio permite una mejor comprensión del fenómeno de la interculturalidad de Asia oriental.

Buena parte de la historia de Okinawa y su cultura durante el siglo XX es la historia de una estigmatización. Si bien es cierto que desde las últimas décadas del siglo pasado las manifestaciones culturales okinawenses han comenzado a recibir una gran atención por parte de los medios y la academia, revirtiendo buena parte de las apreciaciones negativas, no es menos cierto que dicho proceso convive con una estrategia política y económica que exotiza y turistifica la tradición cultural okinawense, y entre ellas el karate, su representante más conocido. Aplicando una perspectiva investigadora que aúna las aportaciones teóricas de los estudios okinawenses, los estudios japoneses, la sociología de la cultura, del deporte, y del consumo, la historia cultural, la antropología social y los estudios culturales, el análisis de las cuestiones hasta ahora mencionadas permite repensar, por un lado, la posición histórica del karate en tanto que símbolo nacional japonés, evidenciando la importancia de las relaciones intra y extra regionales para la comprensión de la cultura del Asia oriental.

Por otro lado, una observación atenta de la condición del karate demuestra que la circulación global de imágenes culturales japonesas está sujeta a procesos de reconfiguración política y económica que se nutren de la dialéctica entre las subculturas y los núcleos de las culturas legítimas, en función de las necesidades domésticas y las demandas transnacionales. Con este doble objetivo la tesis doctoral aborda, en concreto y en extenso, una geografía, Okinawa, y una expresión, el karate, que no cuentan con

trabajos previos en el ámbito académico catalán y español, contribuyendo, en última instancia al campo de estudio de la interculturalidad de Asia oriental.

## Abstract

Karate is one of the most famous martial arts in the world, and one of the main cultural icons incorporated from Japan into the global culture. In historical terms, the international boom of karate, which began in the 1960s, precedes the global interest in other manifestations of Japanese popular culture like sushi, anime, manga or J-pop. Similarly, the symbolic power of karate is expressed not only through martial and/or sporting practices, but also by a large range of consumer products such as films, magazines, books, video games or toys, among many other goods widely disseminated on a global scale. In spite of its image of tradition, broadly spread as an emblem of the Japanese essence and its cultural practices, karate has been, and continues to be, the protagonist of a complex historical process of re-signification of its forms and references in accordance with the context and conditions of the momentum. Especially during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, political, economic and cultural factors have shaped the narratives and discursive practices that have been associated by concatenation with karate, recreating, nuancing or denying previous readings about its manifestation as a cultural expression. Analyzed as a whole, the reproduction and dissemination of these karate representational discourses comprise a remarkably heterogeneous miscellany which, in contrast to widespread reductionist interpretations, shows the enormous internal diversity, past and present, of its cultural manifestation. This ultimately accounts for the constitutive plurality of Japanese culture and society.

Karate, commonly considered as an ancient Japanese martial art, has its origins in Okinawa, a region that until 1879 was an independent state. This fact leads to disputes over the definition and status of karate within the body of *budō*, reflecting the peripheral nature of Okinawa and the complexity of its modern integration into Japan. In any case, it is necessary to point out how, on numerous occasions, the awareness of karate Okinawan origins and of the region cultural peculiarities produce a delegitimizing effect, providing the basis by which the faculty of Okinawan martial art to represent Japanese culture and martial arts is denied.

This thesis seeks deliberately to critically confront those polarities, which rather than contribute, obscure the understanding of the phenomenon through both the reification of essentialist stereotypes and supposed authenticities. All this denies the

richness of the factors that have been stimulating the cultural history of karate, and ends up reinforcing cultural hierarchies, ethnic discriminations, and class and status domination both inside and outside Japan. In this sense, the hypothesis that sustains this investigation is that Okinawan karate constitutes an intercultural manifestation that has cultivated a complex use of the adaptation and resignification of multiple practices and imaginaries resulting from the relationship between Okinawa and Japan, especially in the context of modernity and in an accelerated manner at the current scenario of globalization. Precisely this plasticity integrates karate into wide-ranging sociohistorical and cultural mechanisms, which study allows a better understanding of the East Asian interculturality phenomenon.

Much of the history of Okinawa and its culture during the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the history of a stigmatization. Although it is true that since the last decades of the past century the Okinawan cultural manifestations have begun to receive great attention in the media and the academy, reversing to a good extent negative appreciations, it is not less certain that this process coexists with a political and economic strategy that exoticizes and touristifies the Okinawan cultural tradition, including karate, its best known representative. By applying a research perspective that brings together the theoretical contributions of Okinawan studies, Japanese studies, the sociology of culture, of sport, and of consumption, cultural history, social anthropology, and cultural studies, the analysis of the aforementioned questions allows us to rethink, on the one hand, the historical position of karate as a Japanese national symbol, highlighting the importance of intra- and extra-regional relations for the comprehension of East Asian culture.

On the other hand, a careful observation of karate's condition shows how the global circulation of Japanese cultural images is subject to processes of political and economic reconfiguration that are nourished by the dialectic between subcultures and the nuclei of legitimate cultures, according to domestic needs and transnational demands. With this twofold objective, this doctoral thesis addresses, specifically and extensively, a geography, Okinawa, and an expression, karate, which have no previous work in the Catalan and Spanish academic spheres, ultimately contributing to the study of interculturality in East Asia.

## Introducción

Poco tiempo antes de la muerte de Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) se estrenó un documental protagonizado por el reconocido sociólogo de título *La sociologie est un sport de combat* (2001). En sus últimos años Bourdieu había transitado desde la sociología entendida como una disciplina puramente científica a participar del rol del intelectual público gracias precisamente a su erudición sociológica. A finales de los 90 Bourdieu se hallaba inmerso en debatir el auge del neoliberalismo, y contribuir a la construcción de alternativas políticas contrahegemónicas, bajo el mandato ético de acercar (más bien podría uno decir «traducir»<sup>1</sup>) el conocimiento producido en la universidad a la sociedad, en pos de un muy necesario diálogo con otras esferas y organizaciones sociales. La centralidad de la dimensión ética de tal tarea, de su obligación para el campo de la sociología – y por extensión, añadido, de todas las humanidades- quedaría perfectamente sintetizada en la cita de Bourdieu que da título al documental: «Je dis souvent que la sociologie, c'est un sport de combat, c'est un instrument de self-défense. On s'en sert pour se défendre, essentiellement, et on n'a pas le droit de s'en servir pour faire des mauvais coups.»<sup>2</sup> Loïc Wacquant, discípulo aventajado del sociólogo francés, y autor de una maravillosa etnografía sobre los clubes pugilísticos de barrio en Chicago, *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* (2004), corrobora las palabras de Bourdieu: «La metáfora del título es correcta: la sociología es de hecho un ‘deporte de combate’, ya que sirve para defenderse contra la dominación simbólica, la imposición de categorías de pensamiento, el pensamiento falso. Hace posible que el mundo social no actúe como un pedazo de archivo en un campo magnético. [...] Si un sociólogo se hace entender de inmediato, es porque sólo repite lo que todo el mundo ya sabe. No es su papel ser el loro del sentido común. Por el contrario, es su trabajo ayudar a salir de esto.» (Carles 2001: n.p.).

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<sup>1</sup> “Pero es cierto que si queremos que nuestra investigación sea útil, debemos permitir que la gente se apropie de ella. Este es el dilema de Bourdieu: para llevar a cabo un trabajo científico riguroso, tiene que utilizar herramientas conceptuales que lo alejan de las personas que más necesitarían cosechar los beneficios de ese trabajo. De ahí la importancia de utilizar otras formas de expresión.” Loïc Wacquant (Carles 2001: n.p.).

<sup>2</sup> “A menudo digo que la sociología es un deporte de combate, es un instrumento de autodefensa. La usamos para defendernos, esencialmente, y no tenemos derecho a usarla para hacer malas jugadas” La traducción es mía.

Esta tesis doctoral se encuadra en unos intereses investigadores y unas inquietudes personales que se remontan a mis últimos años de licenciatura en sociología. Fue entonces cuando para una de mis asignaturas de prácticas profesionales diseñé un pequeño proyecto de intervención social en materia de infancia y juventud llamado «Escola de Karate Trini-Do», con el objetivo de ser aplicado en la Trinitat Vella, barrio de Barcelona en el que me crie la mayor parte de mi infancia y adolescencia. El programa buscaba fomentar la práctica deportiva y los valores positivos de las artes marciales como actividad extraescolar pero dentro de los centros educativos de primaria y secundaria. Un tiempo más tarde, en 2014 obtendría un inmerecido tercer lugar, puesto que mi contrincante era mejor, en la modalidad de kata del Campionat Universitari de Catalunya de Karate. De alguna manera uno tiende a la conjugación de sus intereses, de modo que en la práctica de disciplinas deportivas y marciales he encontrado una fuente de realización sincrética, así como de replanteamientos epistemológicos. Todo proyecto decididamente humanístico debe revisar en profundidad la dominación simbólica que ha tendido a establecerse sobre lo corporal, una herramienta también de investigación, y un vector de conocimiento. Estas proposiciones responden a una profunda inquietud personal, dado que la dicotomía analítica entre pensar y hacer, estructura y agencia, palabras y manos, reflexión y actos, es una materia que me intriga sobremanera.

Sucede pues que esta investigación sobre el mundo del karate es, en muchos sentidos, un interés investigador que empecé a vislumbrar en la licenciatura, y que tuvo su continuidad en el «Máster Oficial de Literatura Comparada: Estudios Literarios y Culturales» de la Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, para el cual llevé a cabo un estudio sobre la historia cultural del boxeo a partir de tres relatos cortos de Jack London (González de la Fuente 2015). Mi intención inicial era abordar un estudio sobre las artes marciales, sin embargo, dadas las íntimas relaciones entre la literatura y el boxeo, y las posibilidades de análisis que para ello ofrece la sociología y los estudios culturales opté finalmente por este sistema de lucha. La investigación sobre el boxeo en cuanto a sistema de combate civilizado y espectacularizado, pero también de alta capacidad hermenéutica para el estudio de lo social, lo político, y lo cultural en sentido amplio, fructificó en artículos publicados en revistas científicas (González de la Fuente 2016).

Por lo tanto, esta tesis doctoral supone la oportunidad de satisfacer finalmente un permanente interés personal, desde la convicción de que en la historia cultural del karate

se hallan potenciales explicativos de alto calado para individuos y sociedades por igual. Este estudio responde asimismo a un doble vacío investigador en la academia catalana, española y latinoamericana, pues hasta el momento no he podido localizar tesis doctoral alguna que tuviera como objetos de estudio el karate u Okinawa. Desde la identificación del karate como uno de los capitales simbólicos, culturales y económicos más importantes de Japón, que en su cualidad de icono alberga una facultad única para crear y transmitir significados, este estudio se ha concebido como una reconsideración en múltiples planos. Una reconsideración de la tan difundida como poco conocida historia popular del karate, del porqué de su escasa atención académica; un ensanchamiento de nuestra percepción del alcance sociocultural del fenómeno, y un nuevo aporte teórico y crítico a la literatura de investigación existente.

### **Hipótesis, objeto de estudio y objetivos de la investigación**

La hipótesis que sostiene esta tesis doctoral es que, a pesar de su imagen de tradición inalterada, el karate okinawense constituye una manifestación intercultural que ha cultivado un uso complejo de la adaptación y la resignificación de múltiples prácticas e imaginarios resultantes de la relación entre Okinawa y Japón, especialmente en el contexto de la modernidad y de manera acelerada en el actual escenario de la globalización. Es justamente esta plasticidad la que integra el karate en mecanismos sociohistóricos y culturales de largo alcance, cuyo estudio permite una mejor comprensión del fenómeno de la interculturalidad de Asia oriental.

El karate ha venido ejerciendo, gracias a su poder iconográfico, de puente intercultural entre Japón y el resto del mundo desde medios del siglo pasado, cuando se popularizó internacionalmente gracias al boom de las artes marciales en los *media*, especialmente el cine y la televisión. Japón aspira a que este papel del karate en tanto que embajador cultural se vea renovado y reforzado por los próximos JJ.OO. de Tokio 2021, donde la disciplina debutará como deporte de exhibición. De este modo, el arte marcial de Okinawa debe reconstruirse como un símbolo nacional que expone ante el mundo un nuevo Japón, en el que tradición y modernidad se aúnan en el reconocimiento discursivo de la multiculturalidad del propio país y de la región asiática. La institucionalización de dicha narrativa en torno al kárate, no obstante, pone en juego factores económicos y

políticos que esconden unas determinadas estructuras de poder en las relaciones entre Okinawa como sujeto histórico propio y Japón en tanto que estado-nación moderno. En última instancia el karate, más allá de sus orígenes e importancia para la cultura de Okinawa, en tanto que un bien nacional se alinea con los intereses de las políticas culturales japonesas, los planes económicos, los aspectos geopolíticos y diplomáticos del *soft power* y la estrategia del Cool Japan.

Cabe señalar que el karate puede considerarse, en un sentido histórico-político, como el vehículo hermenéutico que mejor ejemplifica las tensiones en las relaciones histórico-políticas entre Okinawa y Japón, tras la conquista de 1609 y la asimilación de 1879, profundamente marcadas por las relaciones centro-periferia. Durante las primeras décadas del siglo XX el karate de Okinawa es utilizado por las instituciones y autoridades de la región, a través de su inclusión en el sistema escolar, como método pedagógico de aculturación de las nuevas generaciones en los valores nacionales. De este modo y por extensión, el karate, que en esta época de preguerra está adquiriendo una notable fama en Japón, termina cooptado por el nuevo cuerpo político de las artes marciales japonesas, o *budō* moderno, para servir así a los intereses de la patria. Tal proceso requiere de un intenso remodelado de su carga ideológica y representativa, del cual no dejan de participar los maestros de Okinawa. Desde tal perspectiva las dualidades y ambivalencias del proceso de incorporación de Okinawa a Japón quedan perfectamente encarnadas en el estatus del karate. En un sentido este arte marcial actúa como fuente de legitimidad y de reclamo del valor de las particularidades de la cultura okinawense; mientras que en otro viene a confirmar la estigmatización de las tradiciones locales, pues el karate debe ser modernizado y centralizado en dirección a la esencia de «lo japonés» para poder encajar debidamente en las instituciones nacionales y su significación. Si algo define aún hoy en día la posición y condición tanto de Okinawa como del karate en el seno de la nación japonesa es precisamente lo que Oguma (2014) describe como la «dinámica de la inclusión/exclusión» cultural y política.

El objetivo principal de esta tesis doctoral, en consecuencia, es analizar la configuración multifacética de la cultura del karate de Okinawa a través de las múltiples prácticas e imaginarios que subyacen a su construcción moderna y contemporánea. De acuerdo con ello se establecieron tres grandes metas. Primero se ha explorado el karate con relación a las dinámicas de construcción del *nihonjinron* como narrativa hegemónica.



Para ello se ha categorizado y evaluado la dimensión de la tradición y la modernidad en los discursos del karate y sus mitos, tanto a nivel local, como nacional e internacional, reconstruyendo su presencia en el imaginario y el léxico popular colectivo. Ello ha supuesto reexaminar los procesos históricos de creación, deportivización, mercantilización y patrimonialización que han convertido al karate en un mecanismo simbólico de (re)presentación de identidades y alteridades tanto dentro como fuera de Japón. Así, una de las derivadas a abordar ha sido la concepción del karate como una cultura de paz al servicio del encuentro y entendimiento intercultural revelando las distintas praxis narrativas de atribución, sintéticas y antitéticas, que lo conforman. En segundo lugar, se ha acometido una interpretación de la dimensión simbólica del karate en calidad de objeto de consumo de masas, relacionándolo con la identidad japonesa y okinawense, el *nihonjinron*, el *Cool Japan*, el *Nation Branding* y las industrias culturales. En el caso específico de Okinawa la aproximación se ha centrado en algunos de los eventos más recientes de esta década, que se dan dentro del contexto del turismo cultural y a partir de la creación de un tejido industrial destinado específicamente a promocionar y satisfacer el turismo de artes marciales. A tal efecto se han puesto de manifiesto la conjugación de intereses locales, en lo social y en lo económico, que, por un lado, reclaman el karate como patrimonio cultural inmaterial de la humanidad y, por otro, lo configuran dentro de las lógicas capitalistas del mercado en tanto que bien tangible y monetizable. Por último, esta tesis alberga el propósito de apoyar el desarrollo de los estudios sobre Okinawa en el conjunto de los estudios de Asia oriental, reclamando la potencialidad explicativa del karate para arrojar luz sobre una pluralidad de transformaciones sociopolíticas y culturales como puedan ser la comprensión crítica de la dicotomía esencial tradición/modernidad, la articulación de Okinawa en la creación del estado y la identidad japonesa, la creación de mitologías nacionales, o la circulación y asimilación universal de costumbres e imágenes representacionales de la cultura de Asia oriental.

### **Marco teórico y conceptual**

El marco teórico y conceptual de esta tesis doctoral es de un cariz marcadamente interdisciplinario e incluye aportaciones de la historia cultural, los estudios culturales, la sociología del deporte, la sociología del consumo, la antropología social, y los estudios

postcoloniales. Dichos enfoques han sido utilizados, ya desde mediados del siglo XX, para elaborar una gran diversidad de trabajos académicos –fundamentalmente asiáticos y anglosajones– entorno a las artes marciales del Asia oriental, con aportaciones a la filosofía, la psicología, el derecho, las ciencias del deporte o la medicina, además de las disciplinas anteriormente mencionadas. Con estos antecedentes durante la última década se está institucionalizando en la academia el campo de los *martial arts studies* (Bowman 2015, 2018), cuyo objeto representa una fuente de innegable presencia e importancia para el currículo de los estudios del Asia oriental (Wile 2016). Las aproximaciones de los *martial arts studies* parten de la inquietud personal de investigadores académicos que son a su vez practicantes de artes marciales, tal como de la necesidad de atender a ellas en calidad de sujeto destacado para la comprensión tanto de Asia Oriental como del conjunto de la cultura global moderna. La consolidación de los *martial arts studies* revela el creciente interés por un fenómeno que, sin embargo, no ha recibido la atención que requiere en nuestro contexto académico e investigador y que realiza grandes contribuciones a la dicotomía entre tradición y modernidad, uno de los temas perennes de las investigaciones sobre Asia oriental. Asimismo, debemos recordar que la celebración de los próximos juegos Olímpicos de Tokio 2021 supondrá, con toda certeza, un impulso continuado para la sociología del deporte en el ámbito de los estudios japoneses. Desde esta perspectiva, y para clarificar los límites y propósitos de esta tesis es imprescindible acotar varias definiciones conceptuales, empezando por la de artes marciales.

Establecer una definición de artes marciales ha sido una de las mayores preocupaciones teóricas y metodológicas de los *martial arts studies*. La cuestión ha suscitado un amplio debate (Judkins 2016; Lorge 2012; Wetzler 2015) que se complica a partir de la intersección entre artes marciales y deportes de combate (Channon, Jennings 2014). Académicos como Paul Bowman (2015) han argumentado que no resulta tan fructífero fijar consensos acerca de una estricta definición de lo que entendemos por artes marciales, como lo puede ser el disponer de un buen marco analítico y crítico para problematizar su estudio según la pertinencia del caso.

En este sentido concuerdo con Bowman y dada la orientación de esta investigación no fijo una definición rígida del karate en términos históricos o geográficos, pues precisamente uno de los fundamentos y objetivos de esta tesis doctoral es demostrar las múltiples influencias, transformaciones e iteraciones de sus prácticas e imaginarios en

función de circunstancias temporales y territoriales. Así pues, concibo el karate como sinónimo de las artes marciales originarias de Okinawa (similar al uso generalista que se hace del kung fu para denominar las artes marciales Chinas) entendidas a la manera de un conjunto de técnicas corporales y conocimientos físicos y mentales que mantienen conexión con formas de combate con y sin armas, que pueden incluir o no aspectos espirituales, religiosos y filosóficos en su praxis, y que a partir de su difusión se han reinterpretado en un sentido local, nacional o global, siendo reapropiadas por diferentes y en ocasiones contrapuestos discursos político-culturales.

Es precisamente una definición amplia como la que acabo de exponer, cuya piedra de toque es el origen okinawense del karate, la que faculta el ordenamiento y encauce de esta tesis doctoral, destinada a revelar las múltiples valencias del karate. Un ejemplo palmario de este estatus dual, heterogéneo, del arte marcial de Okinawa que opera sobre una indefinición semántica plenamente constitutiva se encuentra en su entrada de la *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan*: «Karate was historically most widely practiced in China and Okinawa and thus is not considered one of the traditional Japanese martial arts; it is, however, loosely referred to as such outside of Japan.» (Kodansha 1983: 158). De este modo comprobamos que desde la perspectiva japonesa el karate es y no es japonés a un mismo tiempo, dependiendo de la contingencia de su consumo doméstico o foráneo. Así podemos decir que existe un karate tradicional, que tiene sus raíces en Okinawa, y un *budō* karate o karate moderno, surgido a partir del siglo XX, cuya pátina de tradicionalidad dentro del acervo de las artes marciales japonesas sería difusa. Con todo, se hace necesario remarcar que el karate sí se ubica oficial y administrativamente bajo el conjunto de artes marciales japonesas pertenecientes a los órganos de la Dai Nippon Butokukai y la Japan Sports Association, la cual depende directamente de la Cabinet Office del primer ministro. El gobierno japonés no alberga duda alguna respecto a la capacidad internacional del karate para obrar como embajador cultural y promotor neto de la esencia japonesa; y así queda demostrado por su inclusión en la categoría de actividades susceptibles de otorgar una visa cultural. El gesto comunicativo es diáfano, pues el karate ofrece a visitantes potenciales la posibilidad de permanecer prolongados períodos de tiempo en el país por motivos educativos. Desde estas consideraciones iniciales, uno de los propósitos fundamentales de esta tesis doctoral es discutir y reevaluar la presupuesta sinicidad y por lo tanto el escaso japonismo del karate. Es por ello,

asimismo, que esta tesis no se orienta tanto a desplegar una taxonomía de organizaciones y estilos de karate como a analizar las propias capacidades representacionales del arte en su conjunto, lo cual acarrea no pocas y significativas paradojas, muy ilustrativas con respecto a procesos históricos, políticos y culturales de amplio calado en el Asia oriental.

Continuando con la tarea de glosa conceptual conviene adentrarse en el eje tradición-modernidad. Empezando por ésta última es necesario precisar que, a pesar de ser común un uso indistinto, «modernidad» y «Edad Moderna» no son equivalentes en términos históricos. Según la Real Academia de la Lengua Española la «modernidad» se define como la cualidad de reciente o contemporáneo al tiempo del enunciante por contraste a lo clásico o establecido. Por otra parte, la «Edad Moderna» es el período histórico que tuvo lugar entre la Edad Medieval y la Contemporánea, es decir aquella que abarca aproximadamente entre los siglos XV y XVIII. Frente a estas formulaciones esta tesis doctoral maneja el término «modernidad» en dos sentidos. En su primera parte, de cariz netamente histórico y que abarca hasta el siglo XVIII, en las ocasiones en que aparezca el término «modernidad» lo hará para delimitar la época de transición entre la Edad Medieval y la Contemporánea, con los necesarios ajustes temporales respecto a las especificidades de la historia de las Ryūkyūs. Ello se debe en gran medida a que las fuentes históricas consultadas, mayormente del ámbito anglosajón, establecen con frecuencia tal equivalencia entre modernidad y Edad Moderna. La tercera parte de esta tesis, centrada en la época contemporánea, utiliza la palabra «modernidad» en su acepción general, similar a la de contemporaneidad, es decir, en tanto que desarrollos civilizatorios que alcanzan nuestro presente y suponen una ruptura considerable y acelerada con respecto a lo establecido en épocas anteriores.

Plantear la cuestión de la tradición supone un debate metodológico de largo alcance, y que podría dar lugar en sí mismo a varias tesis doctorales. En beneficio de la funcionalidad recurriré a la etimología, un recurso extremadamente valioso y elucidario. La palabra «tradición» proviene del latín «traditio», que a su vez se deriva del verbo «tradere» (transmitir, entregar). Es así que la primera acepción de la R.A.E. para «tradición» enfatiza la idea de traspaso o desplazamiento: «Transmisión de noticias, composiciones literarias, doctrinas, ritos, costumbres, etc., hecha de generación en generación.» Gracias a la etimología puede observarse aún mejor la afinidad entre el latín

«tradere» y el inglés «trade» (commerce, craft, practice, a customary course of action)<sup>3</sup> lo que establece un muy interesante paralelismo entre costumbres, transmisión cultural y mercantilización, elementos todos ellos clave en el desarrollo de esta tesis doctoral. En otras palabras, en estas páginas el uso de la palabra «tradición» se opone al de «tradicionalismo», albergando la primera por tanto un común de prácticas y conocimientos que, sin dejar de transmitir una continuidad, no son en absoluto estáticos o esencialistas, sino reelaborados y adecuados en el devenir histórico.

De acuerdo con el título de esta tesis es igualmente vital dedicar unas líneas a la noción de globalización. Como ha demostrado Beck (1998) la globalización es también un concepto polisémico, ambiguo y multidimensional. Solemos entender la globalización como un fenómeno típicamente contemporáneo y estrechamente ligado a una lógica transnacional que afecta a espacios sociales, prácticas culturales y oportunidades comerciales. Como podrá verse a partir del estudio desarrollado en estas páginas, es necesario abrir nuestro horizonte conceptual en torno a la globalización hacia el pasado. Si bien con anterioridad a los siglos XIX y XX la velocidad de transmisión de la información gracias a la tecnología— que es lo que caracteriza la globalización contemporánea, así como la rapidez de desplazamiento de personas y bienes era mucho menor, no menos cierta es la inexistencia de estados-nación en sentido moderno, es decir como unidades territoriales con un control estricto y efectivo sobre fronteras y migraciones. Con frecuencia solemos aplicar nuestros marcos mentales de los estados-nación en retrospectiva hacia épocas y periodos en los cuales el volumen de movimientos humanos y relaciones interculturales, económicas y científicas, entre diferentes regiones era enorme, como podrá comprobarse para el caso de Okinawa y sus artes marciales en varias secciones de esta tesis. De este modo, si entendemos globalización como circulación de individuos, ideas y bienes debido al desdibujado de las fronteras nacionales, debemos reconocer que estos fenómenos ya se daban en la antigüedad. Recordemos no obstante que la gran diferencia entre el pasado y el presente es una la aceleración tecnológica que afecta principalmente a la velocidad y requerimientos de transmisión de la información. Tal es la celeridad de los cambios producidos por la tecnología en el último siglo que algunos autores ya diferencian entre lo que sería una vieja globalización,

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<sup>3</sup> Merriam-Webster dictionary.

la cual adquiere gran impulso a partir del siglo XIX (máquina de vapor, motores de combustión, telégrafo eléctrico) y una «nueva globalización» que emerge a finales del siglo XX, íntimamente ligada a la digitalización, la economía financiera, las corporaciones, la crisis del trabajo y, por consiguiente, de las clases trabajadoras (Baldwin 2016; Cox 2019)

En cuanto a Okinawa, debe significarse que en su territorio se concentran circunstancias como una situación periférica, una notable diáspora, una doble ocupación de territorio e imaginario por parte japonesa y estadounidense, o una dependencia económica respecto a ambas naciones que la sitúa como la prefectura más pobre de todo Japón. Dichos factores hacen de la realidad sociocultural del archipiélago un campo fértil para el análisis del karate como un fenómeno intercultural global. El lugar de Okinawa y su cultura en el seno de la nación japonesa, habida cuenta de los procesos históricos combinados de minoración y exotización de la misma para su explotación política y comercial, es objeto de intenso debate académico, sin que exista un consenso entre especialistas para definir su situación geopolítica. Por ejemplo (Isao, 2013) ha definido el archipiélago como un lugar de «intersección de colonialismos», compartiendo la aplicación de un marco colonial y postcolonial en los estudios sobre Okinawa con autores como Nishiyama (2019) o Hamamoto (2006) quien utiliza el concepto de «soft colonialism». Otros, no obstante, argumentan que categoría de colonialismo puede inducir a error (Christy 1993; Siddle 1998), pues la situación de Okinawa, en muchos aspectos, no es asimilable a las de Taiwán, Corea o Manchuria. Sin negar las coerciones y efectos de las políticas imperialistas y asimilacionistas del Japón de preguerra en Okinawa, conocidas como *doka seisaku* y emprendidas para la asimilación de los estilos de vida y las ideologías de las poblaciones de sus colonias a las suyas propias, cabe atender con esmero a las particularidades de las relaciones históricas de Okinawa con Japón, amplias, profundas y que cubren varios siglos. Reconocer que Okinawa fue en el pasado una entidad política y cultural independiente, un reino autónomo, no implica que las islas formaran en sí una entidad homogénea y cerrada, ni que su esfera cultural no presentara rasgos notables de niponidad (Nelson 2008; Pearson 2001a). De hecho, cuando en 1879 la situación de Okinawa fue objeto de negociaciones entre el Gobierno Meiji y el Imperio Chino Qing, el entroncamiento lingüístico del *uchinaguchi*, el idioma local, con el japonés, fueron uno de los argumentos étnico-antropológicos más potentes de entre

los esgrimidos por Japón. Como veremos más adelante, precisamente a partir de la ocupación por parte del clan Satsuma en 1609 empezó la construcción cultural del Reino de las Ryūkyūs como un Otro radicalmente distinto a Japón, impulsando políticas de sinificación (Akamine 2016; Smits 2019a) y exotización (Toby 2019). En este sentido, la dificultad de estructurar y vincular Okinawa y Japón queda patente una vez más en el estatus ambivalente del karate que he referido unas líneas más arriba. Por consiguiente, en esta tesis he optado por flanquear la cuestión del colonialismo con los necesarios apuntes allá donde sean pertinentes, pero haciendo un mayor uso de la propuesta de Oguma (2014), la cual resulta especialmente procedente para mi propósito, pues propone modular el nexo Okinawa-Japón en base al par conceptual inclusión-exclusión.

Frente a esta formulación, la inclusión de la dimensión identitaria y territorial asiste en el desentrelazamiento y problematización del karate en cuanto que manifestación esencial y distintiva de la identidad japonesa. A tal efecto se he recurrido a investigaciones que ponen en tela de juicio el género *nihonjinron* (Befu 1993; Guarné 2017), definido también como la «hegemonía de la homogeneidad» (Befu 2001) étnica y social japonesa. El karate es el fenómeno cultural okinawense de mayor propagación mundial, y por tanto encontramos en él una excelente oportunidad de aproximación al estudio sociohistórico de la multiculturalidad en la sociedad japonesa (Lie 2001), ya que en su construcción se congregan tantos elementos multiétnicos como de estratificación social (Sugimoto 2016). De este modo, el karate, entendido como espacio de concurrencias sociales, culturales y económicas, es un ámbito productivo para analizar las políticas culturales y económicas de Japón, arrojando luz sobre sus relaciones intra y extraculturales en el contexto de la globalización. Esta investigación explora por qué motivos, con qué mecanismos, y con qué orientaciones se establece la relación triunvirata entre karate, Okinawa y *nihonjinron*, en la que juegan un papel clave las ideas de centro y periferia, diáspora e identidad, tradición y modernidad, cultura y comercialización. El papel de dichos vectores en la historia de incorporación y asimilación de la idiosincrasia de las Ryūkyūs a la nación japonesa se inscribe análogamente en las transformaciones sufridas por el karate, que a su vez actúa como vehículo protagonista de las mismas. La modernización y nacionalización del karate en el siglo XX a partir de su popularización en Japón se incardinan en un doble movimiento de tradicionalización y deportivización. Ya con anterioridad a su aceptación por parte de la Dai Nippon Butokukai en los años

treinta, el karate en Okinawa se estandariza progresivamente y se convierte, al menos parcialmente, en deporte. Como establecieron Elías y Dunning (1992) para el proceso civilizatorio moderno es absolutamente imprescindible una pacificación de la violencia y las pasiones mediante el deporte y el ocio; lo que representa una transmutación de impulsos agonísticos y competitivos presentes en el ser humano a nuevas formas, más organizadas y codificadas, pero, sobre todo, menos lesivas que las de tiempos anteriores. Modos tradicionales, considerablemente severos, que conllevan códigos, valores y quehaceres en desuso (probablemente social y políticamente incómodos) devienen, de esta manera, deportes modernos aptos para su introducción en los currículos escolares y el consumo de masas, sin perder las metáforas guerreras y una cierta posibilidad de reconversión. Las artes marciales japonesas y el *bushidō*, tanto en sus aspectos organizacionales prácticos como en los culturales e ideológicos, no quedan fuera de esta dinámica civilizatoria global (Guttman 2001; Sánchez-García 2018), interaccionando en la constitución del espíritu y la estructura nacional japonesa (Pita 2014). Esto ocurre en modalidades adaptadas que pretenden legitimar determinadas dominaciones de clase y estrato, a la vez que actúan como conectoras, entre tradición y nuevo régimen, para las profundas transformaciones sociales en curso.

Esta corriente general de las artes marciales se entrecruza con la peculiaridad del karate de Okinawa a finales del siglo XIX en tanto que manifestación cultural característicamente periférica o marginal. Con tal de ser incluido en el grupo de las artes marciales tradicionales, el karate hubo de acomodarse a una serie de reformas que son también exploradas por esta tesis. Es necesario señalar que dicho proceso cristaliza en la estandarización de la imagen mínima del karate, a saber, su propia escritura. De esta manera, las diversas formas en que se denominaba al karate en Okinawa se unifican en ‘mano vacía’ (空手), acepción que refleja el discurso programático del creciente nacionalismo japonés al añadir un componente ideológico y cultural, ‘el vacío’, que identificará al karate con el espíritu del *budō* (McCarthy, 2016). Tras la Segunda Guerra Mundial, con la extensiva ocupación militar del archipiélago de las Ryūkyū por parte estadounidense, el karate recibe un impulso de orden mundial en su expansión, que le añade nuevos estratos de interculturalidad mediante sus exportaciones y reelaboraciones culturales fuera de Japón (Krug 2001), marcadas por un fuerte componente de hipertradicionalización y «bushidización».



Estos procesos interculturales, que redefinen las nociones de okinawense, japonés, y de artes marciales en general, continúan vigentes en la actualidad. Como he señalado, a esta dinámica se suma, en tiempos recientes, la aceleración del proceso globalizador, que ha supuesto un giro económico en las sociedades postindustriales hacia los sectores de las industrias culturales y del ocio; giro del que las artes marciales no han quedado, a pesar de su revestimiento tradicionalista, exentas (Ko, Yang 2009; Bowman 2010).

Tales condicionantes que se encuadran por medio de lo que se denomina *martial arts tourism* (Cynarski 2012; Miller 2010) en la actividad cultural y económica de Okinawa orientada esencialmente al ocio y el turismo a partir del patrimonio cultural (Bonet 2011; Casey 2013; Figal 2012; Nguyen 2017). Sin duda, estructura comercial y cultural resulta de vital importancia no sólo para resituar las Ryūkyū en el mapa mundial, sino para asegurar las condiciones de existencia de la prefectura más pobre de todo Japón. La dinámica de mercantilización y ocio del karate se encuadra dentro de la dinámica más general de la nueva economía japonesa del *Cool Japan* (Daliot-Bul, 2009) y el *National Branding* (Iwabuchi, 2015), al servicio del ejercicio del *soft power* (Nye 2004; Otmazgin 2016; Watanabe, McConnell 2008), mediante la diplomacia cultural pública y a caballo de la globalización de los mercados y la expansión del turismo. El «turismo de artes marciales» opera de nuevo como un engranaje de conexión de la tradición con nuevas formas culturales y mercantiles; reificando el misticismo y la distinción de la experiencia única que el karateka que visita Okinawa puede vivir en el seno de la única fuente original del karate. Tal discurso, ya institucionalizado entre practicantes de todo el mundo hasta el punto de que algunos investigadores hablan más que de *martial arts* de *martial brands* (Bowman 2013; Judkins 2013), actúa bajo la forma del mecanismo de deseo propio de las lógicas capitalistas de mercado, creando el anhelo de acercarse a la realidad del karate en Okinawa como fuente de autenticidad y tradición. Un acercamiento crítico a estas ideas nos permite revisar las nociones de tradición inalterada y transmisión de valores metacomerciales del karate desde una perspectiva sociológica. De igual manera, la aproximación histórica y cultural de esta tesis tiene en cuenta la reinención de la tradición y la legitimación de la misma, elucidando sus fuentes semi-legendarias y contrastándolas con los hechos sociales concretos, permitiendo establecer claramente las épocas y transformaciones que ha sufrido la disciplina y su concepto hasta su momento actual. Para ello se realizan algunos apuntes alrededor del papel de las élites sociales y

culturales que influyen en la propagación del karate, de la emergencia de sus intereses específicos en tanto que vectores de fuerza en pugna por la legitimidad de su estatus en el contexto okinawense, japonés e internacional.

### **Metodología y herramientas de investigación**

Metodológicamente, esta tesis ha aplicado parámetros fundamentalmente de carácter cualitativo y de orientación interdisciplinaria, sustentándose en las aportaciones de la historia cultural, la antropología social, la sociología del deporte, la sociología del consumo y los estudios culturales y poscoloniales. Para conseguir las finalidades investigadoras se ha hecho uso de las herramientas teóricas y metodológicas propias del análisis histórico, el estudio cultural y la teoría de la representación aplicadas a fuentes textuales primarias y secundarias. A ello se han podido incorporar algunos hallazgos de la metodología etnográfica gracias a la realización de un trabajo de campo en Okinawa sobre el mundo del kárate y las artes marciales.

La colección y selección de fuentes bibliográficas y documentales ha conllevado gran parte del esfuerzo metodológico de esta tesis, que se ha orientado a desarrollar una historia cultural del karate que abarca el período comprendido entre los siglos XIV a XX. Tal empresa ha debido atender a un ánimo comparatista que ha revisado en profundidad monografías y artículos académicos dedicados a la historia sociocultural del Asia oriental, en especial de Okinawa combinando el uso de monografías clásicas (Kerr 1958) con obras recientes y actualizadas a cargo de destacados investigadores en la materia (Akamine 2016; Smits 2019). El mismo principio se ha aplicado a Japón (Morris-Suzuki 1998; Guarné 2017) y China (Feuchtwang 1992; Hamashita 2013) así como ocasionalmente de regiones como Corea o el sureste asiático. Al conceptualizarse el karate de Okinawa como heredero de una cultura marcial que interaccionó con múltiples cosmovisiones, costumbres y expresiones de la región se han consultado fuentes que analizaban los cambios sociopolíticos de la región, las diversas clases sociales y sus numerosos referentes folclóricos, religiosos y simbólicos, cuestión de capital importancia que se aborda en la parte dos de esta tesis. En cuanto al karate, en el ámbito académico, y en ausencia de monografías específicas, se han consultado los artículos disponibles, que se hayan listados en la sección acerca del estado de la cuestión. De igual manera se han

trabajado las referencias que se alienan en general con los *martial arts studies*, gracias a lo cual se han podido incorporar numerosas fuentes escolares que han servido para enriquecer y ampliar la escasez de estudios sobre el karate. Por este mismo motivo en el proceso de esta tesis se han consultado diversos libros de historia del karate, ya hayan sido obras o biografías de maestros, de historiadores no académicos, artículos y revistas de divulgación o incluso producciones audiovisuales, todos ellos principalmente en inglés. Los recursos disponibles en la web han sido otra de las fuentes más relevantes de esta tesis, pues han permitido conocer y contrastar buena parte de las mitologías e imágenes culturales asociadas al karate por parte de practicantes y aficionados. En cuanto a determinadas informaciones respecto a los desarrollos más recientes del turismo de karate en Okinawa, los servicios ofrecidos, los esfuerzos institucionales y las políticas gubernamentales la web se ha descubierto de nuevo como una valiosa, por no decir única, fuente de información disponible.

Desde el punto de vista de la bibliografía académicas las estancias de investigación realizadas han sido decisivas. Las llevadas a cabo en el en el Centro de Estudios de Asia y África (CEAA), Departamento de Estudios de Asia, El Colegio de México (COLMEX) entre octubre de 2017 y junio de 2018, y agosto de 2019 y julio de 2020, han dotado a esta tesis de una serie de referencias especializadas sobre el Asia oriental inaccesibles en la geografía catalana y española; posibilitando el trabajo con investigadoras de primer nivel en el campo de los estudios japoneses como son las profesoras Satomi Miura y Michiko Tanaka. En cuanto a las fuentes documentales en torno a Okinawa, y muy particularmente el karate, la estancia de investigación en la Faculty of Global and Regional Studies de la University of the Ryūkyūs entre agosto y el diciembre de 2018 ha provisto este trabajo de textos únicos y de difícil acceso, buena parte de los cuales no se encuentra disponible en otros territorios. Ello me ha propiciado alcanzar un nivel de detalle y profundizar en la comprensión de la historia cultural de las Ryūkyūs que de otra manera hubiera sido inasequible. La heterogeneidad ha sido uno de los rasgos distintivos de la cultura de Okinawa desde el siglo XIV, con manifestaciones que revelan la multiplicidad de influencias que ha recibido como resultado de su ubicación geográfica en medio del mar de China, espacio poroso que recientes investigaciones empiezan a conceptualizar como «el Mediterráneo del Asia Oriental» (Schottenhammer 2005, 2008). Gracias a la estancia en Japón puede encontrar el apoyo

y orientación de los profesores Katsuki Miyahira de la University of The Ryūkyūs, y Yoshio Watanabe, emérito de la Tokyo Metropolitan University. El tiempo en Okinawa me ofreció la posibilidad de realizar trabajo de campo en torno al turismo en el archipiélago, teniendo en cuenta las imbricaciones de dicho sector económico con el karate, a partir de la visita a lugares emblemáticos ya sean los Castillo de Shuri y Urasoe el Mercado Público de Makishi, el Jardín Fukushūen, Sefa Utaki, la isla de Kudaka, el Museo de Historia y Patrimonio de Yomitan, el antiguo Cuartel General Subterráneo de la Marina Japonesa en la Segunda Guerra Mundial, el Okinawa Budōkan o el recientemente inaugurado Karate Kaikan (2017), con su magnífico museo, amén de templos, santuarios, lugares y monumentos relacionados específicamente con la historia del karate.

Sin lugar a duda, conviene resaltar que el contacto con profesionales, especialistas e instituciones como también la participación en ponencias, jornadas y congresos internacionales ha supuesto una de las mayores aportaciones metodológicas a esta tesis. El intercambio de ideas que brindan las relaciones profesionales y los foros de discusión son una de las principales vetas de enriquecimiento de perspectivas como también de descubrimiento de interseccionalidades entre la propia investigación y los objetos de estudio de otros colegas y campos de conocimiento. A este respecto cabe destacar que avances de esta tesis doctoral han sido presentados en forma de papers en congresos, simposios y workshops como la 14<sup>th</sup> European Association for Sociology of Sport Conference: «The Values of Sport: between tradition and (tabla) modernity» (Charles University, Prague, 15/ a 17 de junio de 2017), el VIII Simposi Internacional de Joves Investigadors en Traducció, Interpretació, Estudis Interculturals i Estudis de l'Àsia Oriental (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 30 de junio de 2017), el simposio «Ecos mitológicos en la cultura moderna de Japón» del cual también fui organizador (El Colegio de México, 23 de abril de 2018), el workshop «Religion and Sport in Japan» (Western Michigan University, del 1 al 4 de marzo de 2019), y la Western Conference of the Association for Asian Studies (El Colegio de México 18 y 19 de Octubre de 2019).

La asistencia e intervención en tales encuentros me ha permitido establecer una red investigadora con académicos especialistas a partir de la cual he podido enriquecer el corpus de perspectivas y aproximaciones de mi estudio, abriendo nuevos espacios de reflexión y líneas de conocimiento para aspectos capitales de mi estudio, al igual que

interesantes líneas de investigación futuras. De igual manera me ha habilitado para difundir e integrar esta investigación doctoral en redes académicas nacionales e internacionales gracias a lo cual se han creado oportunidades de colaboración y publicación.

### **Estado de la cuestión y estructura de la investigación**

Esta tesis se centra en el análisis de las diversas articulaciones de las imágenes culturales del karate en especial durante el siglo XX, una veta investigadora que hasta el momento cuenta con escasa literatura académica. La gran mayoría de la bibliografía disponible acerca del karate pertenece a los campos de las ciencias del deporte y las medicinas, cuyas perspectivas analizan mayormente cuestiones de rendimiento, lesiones y respuesta física. Desde las ciencias sociales y las humanidades existen muy pocos trabajos que se hayan destinado específicamente al karate. Recientemente Michael Molasky, un conocido investigador de literatura okinawense, señalaba esta falta de referencias incluso en Japón. Así el *Research Journal of Budo (Budōgaku kenkyū)* de la Academia japonesa del Budo (*Nihon budō gakkai*) ha publicado, desde 1968, 1.464 artículos dedicados al *kendō*, o 1.415 al *judō*, mientras que los que han recogido investigaciones en torno al karate se reducen a 198. Como bien apunta Molasky: «Considering the worldwide prominence of karate as an iconic Japanese martial art [...] I suspect that many readers will find these numbers to be as surprising as I did.» (Molasky 2018: 7).

La situación es similar en el campo de los estudios okinawenses, hecho que resulta igualmente sorprendente pues el karate es la expresión de la cultura de Okinawa más difundida y conocida a nivel mundial. Pareciera, no obstante, que el karate no ha logrado configurarse como un objeto de estudio legítimo para el campo de los estudios okinawenses, quedando relegado a apariciones ocasionales y notas al pie. Así, pequeños pero continuos rastros del karate han aparecido en obras de los principales especialistas académicos no asiáticos (Allen 2002: 11, 40; Allen 2008: 198; Caroli 2013: 261; Figal 2012: 160; Kerr 1958: 217; Smits 2010: 9) lo que indica la ineludible omnipresencia de las artes marciales en el patrimonio de Ryūkyūs. Aun así, exploraciones específicas sobre la raigambre, relaciones e implicaciones del karate para la cultura y la política de Okinawa no han merecido hasta el momento la atención debida. Por otra parte, buena parte de los

artículos sobre karate se han enfocado en estudios etnográficos acerca de la dimensión ritualista de la experiencia de práctica en el *dojo* (Donohue 1993; Ashkenazi 2002) y sus factores de socialización (James, Jones 1982), por lo general en el marco de las artes marciales como religiones semiseculares (Brown, Jennings, Molle, 2009).

Ello no significa que carezcamos de fuentes desde disciplinas históricas o sociales. Ahora bien, deseo hacer hincapié en que, a diferencia de estudios previos, esta tesis doctoral dedica el grueso de su investigación a los períodos anteriores al siglo XX y posteriores a la recuperación de posguerra que nos acercan al siglo XXI. Esta planificación, que aborda pero sobrepasa con creces un período germinal en la historia moderna del karate como es el de preguerra, responde a varias razones. En primer lugar, porque dicho momento histórico es, con mucho, la fase histórica de configuración del karate más estudiada, y la que concentra referencias académicas sumamente valiosas (Johnson 2012; Meyer 2008; Sánchez-García 2018; Tan 2004). De similar forma, las primeras décadas del karate en el siglo XX cuentan con numerosas biografías y publicaciones de maestros (Funakoshi 1981, 1996; Mabuni 2001; Nagamine 2000, 2011), así como obras de historiadores del karate no pertenecientes a círculos académicos (Bishop 1996, 2018; Golinski 2010; Hokama 2005; McCarthy 1999a, 1999b, 2016; Quast 2015). Un período de tal trascendencia para la historia cultural del karate, no obstante, está lejos de agotar sus posibilidades de investigación. Cabe mencionar como ejemplo paradigmático las actas de la famosa «Reunión de los Maestros de Karate» de 1936, en la que se decidió homogeneizar la escritura del karate como «mano vacía». No sólo el documento y las palabras de los participantes en la reunión, sus posiciones personales y sus mensajes, merecen un análisis exhaustivo, sino también el contexto sociocultural de la sesión. En la tercera parte de esta tesis se ofrecen algunos fundamentos para futuras investigaciones en torno a un evento crucial en la historia del karate.

Con la finalidad de analizar la construcción y contenidos de las imágenes culturales del karate, frecuentemente fundamentadas en lecturas y relecturas del pasado, ha sido indispensable destinar una considerable extensión de esta tesis a los hechos históricos que dieron lugar a la formación y desarrollo del Reino de las Ryūkyū. En caso contrario esa investigación hubiera reproducido muchas de las prenociones que componen la visión y comprensión del karate tanto en círculos académicos como fuera de ellos. Por otra parte, dado que las imágenes del karate no se componen únicamente de

discursos, sino muy destacadamente de símbolos gráficos y emblemas, se hizo igualmente imprescindible atender a los orígenes de tales pictogramas y su capacidad metalingüística para desentrelazar genealogías y significados, lo que en última instancia conllevó un estudio de las interrelaciones de la religión y lo sagrado con la cultura marcial de las Ryūkyūs.

Así pues, la necesidad metodológica explica la estructuración de esta tesis, los temas y argumentos de cada una de sus partes. Tras la sección de introducción teórica, conceptual y metodológica, que ahora nos ocupa, el primer capítulo explora en términos sociohistóricos las artes marciales de Okinawa entre los siglos XIV y XVII. Para ello se analizan factores que están en la base de la formación y consolidación del Reino de las Ryūkyū, es decir el lugar de los señores feudales locales (*aji*), el comercio marítimo, la piratería, y de los intercambios técnicos, científicos y culturales con Japón, China y Corea. En este entorno, sin capacidad militar el establecimiento del Reino de las Ryūkyū hubiera sido inconcebible. Por consiguiente, el primer capítulo se dirige al núcleo de una de las narrativas que configuran tanto el karate como la historia de Okinawa: el mito de su pacifismo connatural. Correlacionado con ello, el capítulo contrasta frente a los hechos históricos dos de los fundamentos del karate que se anclan en sucesos acaecidos durante este período, y que han adquirido mayor circulación global: la llegada de las 36 familias de Fujian en 1392 y la invasión samurái de 1609.

A continuación, el capítulo segundo enfoca las interacciones históricas entre religión y cultura marcial en Okinawa, de la que se deriva buena parte de la simbología que hoy en día expone el karate a través de sus prácticas y objetos. El capítulo se organiza entorno a casos de estudio que inician con una aproximación a la importancia del chamanismo y el poder mágico de las figuras femeninas para la tradición cultural y marcial de las Ryūkyūs. Partiendo de esta base, con la que se halla intrínsecamente conectada, se introduce la figura de Uni-Ufugusuku, héroe histórico-marcial propio de Okinawa, cuyo escudo familiar es el emblema de uno de los estilos de karate más difundidos por todo el mundo. Posteriormente se entabla una indagación sobre Hachiman, dios japonés de la guerra. Los cultos a Hachiman alcanzaron las Ryūkyūs en multitud de formas, y su insignia, el *hidari gomon*, universal en la iconografía del karate de Okinawa, se convirtió en bandera oficial de la realeza de las Ryūkyūs. Los últimos dos ejemplos de este estudio temático sobre geografías religiosas de Asia Oriental y karate miran hacia

Fujian, región de China de prolongadas y profundas relaciones con Okinawa. Las artes marciales de Fujian ejercerían una influencia capital sobre el karate. De este modo, se abordan los casos de Mazu, diosa patrona de las gentes de mar, y centro litúrgico de los vínculos diplomáticos entre China y las Ryūkyūs; así como el de Marshal Tian, dios del teatro y la música, remodelado hoy en Okinawa como patrón del karate *Gōjū-ryū*.

El tercer capítulo entra de lleno en la contemporaneidad para tratar la modernización y «japonización» del karate durante las primeras décadas del siglo XX. Dichos desarrollos son simultáneos a los de Okinawa que, asimilada por el estado-nación japonés, pasa de ser un reino semi autónomo a una prefectura, reflejando el karate de este modo trascurros más amplios. Frente a lo comúnmente sobreentendido, no obstante, los principales actores del karate de Okinawa no se resistieron a las reformas introducidas en el karate, sino que al contrario en muchas ocasiones las lideraron. Por tanto, la sección repiensa, de acuerdo con el estatus periférico de Okinawa y a la estigmatización de sus costumbres, el ajuste del karate a las tradiciones del *budō* y a la esencia de lo japonés o *nihonjinron*. Tal deliberación se vincula a posteriori con la difusión global del karate en tanto que icono de la nación japonesa durante la segunda mitad del siglo XX. Una iconicidad que, de hecho, se alimenta de la multiculturalidad y diversos estratos que componen la sociedad japonesa, así como de otras geografías de Asia y del resto del globo. El tercer capítulo prosigue con un acercamiento a nuestra contemporaneidad mediante un análisis del sistemático proceso de patrimonialización y turistificación del karate a partir de los años 90, muy cercano a la recuperación de la herencia cultural del Reino de las Ryūkyūs y a la comodificación de sus aspectos materiales e inmateriales. Recogiendo todo lo expuesto hasta el momento, el capítulo finaliza con una reflexión sobre la institucionalización del arte marcial de Okinawa en el marco de la estrategia nacional del Cool Japan. Por último, las conclusiones recapitulan y presentan los resultados de esta investigación.

Por su aproximación los capítulos de la tesis nos permiten comprobar la articulación del karate de Okinawa como un objeto de estudio y una práctica multidimensional que manifiesta la interculturalidad del Asia oriental. Lo hace precisamente por la diversidad de usos e imaginarios que la componen, que se adaptan y resignifican de acuerdo con las circunstancias de las relaciones Okinawa - Japón, notablemente determinadas por la modernidad y la globalización.



# Chapter 1. Sociohistorical Basis of Okinawan Martial Arts

This chapter is dedicated to an exploration to the fighting and military antecessors of karate in the Ryūkyūs between the 13th and 17th century from a sociohistorical perspective. Therefore, the first pages account early notices on the islands and its inhabitants in the period that will lead to a stratified society dominated by medieval lords. The following sections analyze the formation of the Ryūkyū Kingdom and the place of violence for the setting of its maritime empire in a time deeply affected by piracy in the East China Sea. From these groundings the chapter proceeds with a discussion of three of the most circulating myths about Okinawan karate past. The first contrasts against the historical facts the romanticized views of the Ryūkyūs as a peaceful kingdom without weapons, a country that in an epoch of vast disturbances and military encounters relied exclusively on an exquisite diplomacy for its conservation. Such image exceeds the mere sphere of karate to conform the overall image of Okinawa. The second and third legendary underpinnings of karate to be discussed are the arrival of 36 families from Fujian, said to have introduced Chinese martial arts to Okinawa, and the Samurai invasion of 1609 which allegedly prompted the evolution of karate. The chapter concludes with a revisitation of the medieval history of the Ryūkyūs and how it has been recreated by karate narratives, including some notes on what we can learn from this distant past to understand the actual geopolitical situation of Okinawa.

## 1.1. A Brief Introduction to Old Ryūkyūs

The Ryūkyū Islands have been inhabited since 32.000 to 18.000 B.C. with the oldest remains found in the southern part of the archipelago, suggesting hence a migration trend from a Southern Chinese or Southeast Asian culture that entered through the Yaeyama islands (Kreiner 2001: 1). Bronze arrowheads from the times of the Han dynasty (206 B.C. - 22 A.D.) have been found along with coins, items of clothing, and charms (Akamine 2016: 4).<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, diverse archeological research carried along the

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<sup>4</sup> This migration of a group of peoples coming from continental China and following the Kuroshio current to the north is a popular theory in Japan on the arrival of rice, developed by one of the fathers of folklore

Ryūkyūs has shown that since ancient times (10.000 B.C.), the islands were colonized from the north by small communities of fishers, hunters, and gatherers native from Kyūshū, Japan. The *Shoku Nihongi* (797), one of the oldest documents accounting the history of ancient Japan, gives notice of tributes sent to the imperial court from peoples living in the northern part of the Okinawan archipelago in 699. Those tributes were afterwards transferred to the Ise Shrine, one of the most important cultic centers of the Japanese territory, indicating hence that those southern peoples were seen as Japanese (Kreiner 2001: 2). This period of Ryūkyūan history that I am addressing is commonly known as “Old Ryūkyū” but must be understood in terms of “Medieval Ryūkyū” to better differentiate it from the early modern period, which began after the Satsuma clan of 1609 (Murai 2008: iii)

In 753 a Japanese ambassador ship in its way to Tang China stopped at the main island of the Ryūkyū archipelago. It provided the first historical document in which the name “Ajinawa”, in other words, Okinawa, appears: “It is explained as *oki* meaning ‘high sea’ and *nawa* meaning ‘rope,’ but would be more plausible if we interpret *aji* as ‘local lord’ and *nawa* as ‘fishing territory’ (Kreiner 2001: 2). The Chinese annals *Sui shu* (636-656), of the Sui Dynasty (581-618), also report the existence of this chain of islands under the name of Ryūkyū (*Liuqiu*), frequently as the “greater” (大) Ryūkyū to distinguish them from Taiwan or “lesser” (小) Ryūkyū. Until 800 AD the subsistence form for the island’s inhabitants relied heavily on fishing and marine activities because agriculture was hampered by volcanic and coral soils. However, around that time, new methods of agriculture and advancements in farming appeared. By 1050 better cultivation productivity and increased trade throughout the archipelago changed the mode of settlements and subsistence (Yamamoto 2008 3-4). The economic growth led to the commencement of the *Gusuku* period (1050 to 1429) defined by the widespread presence of fortifications (*gusuku*), first surrounding human settlements, then situated in hilltops for vigilance purposes, and finally as large and multi-structure castles made from stonework (today up to 135 *gusuku* remains are still conserved). The other defining factor of this historical period is the intensified battles resulting from marine activities and competing local feudal lords (*aji*), from which derive to the changes on the forms of

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studies Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962). Kreiner, nonetheless, considers this conjecture difficult to prove (Kreiner 2001: 2).

human settlements and the movements of peoples from coastal zones to hilltops (Yamamoto 2008: 8-9).

Although it seems that the construction of the biggest castles did not start until the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the economic basis for this societal change began already in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. According to Richard Pearson (2001: 96; 2013: 47-48), between the 10th and 11th centuries the Ryūkyūs witnessed an early phase for the formation of a state, through an initial process of social specialization and the development of arts and crafts professions, which took place on the main island of Okinawa. Probably these transformations resulted from the arrival of overseas technical experts, of which a large part were dedicated to improving the local defense systems (Yamamoto 2008: 10-11). Therefore, a stratified society of villages, ruled by a dominant warrior class (*aji*), and within geographical limits and hierarchical architectures emerged. The use of iron tools, produced or imported, was extensive and served for farming, fishing, fighting, and fortress construction: “Castle building required huge amounts of labor, and the presence of so many defensive works indicates widespread warfare, conducted by local chiefs. In the *Gusuku* period the forging of iron weapons and tools became widespread.” (Pearson 2001b, 246).

Furthermore, the excavations have revealed arrowheads, *tsuba* sword fittings, armor slats, and knives, and even cannon remains,<sup>5</sup> as well as agricultural tools susceptible of being used as weaponry like sickles, hoes, nails, adzes, or awls, made by metal materials arrived from Kyūshū and China. During this *gusuku* era the Ryūkyūs were not a closed culture but participated intensively from a vast network of sea migrations, commerce, and customs. Noticeably some of the *gusuku* structures were destined for religious purposes, and iron and other nonferrous metals like bronze were also cast or imported in the form of religious objects and armor ornaments (Pearson 2013: 246).

Chinese historical documents confirm the variety of weapons found in archeological remains. In the *Zhu Fan Zhi* (Records of Various Barbarians), compiled between (1225-1227) by the official administrator of Fujian trading vessels, appears a description of the Ryūkyūan bellicosity:

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<sup>5</sup> “Large, extensively excavated sites such as Katsuren and Nakijin reveal a series of walled enclosures containing freestanding buildings reached through a main gate flanked with defensive protruding walls, often with holes for fire cannons, for repelling invaders.” (Pearson 2001b, 246).

In Ryūkyū, armor is made of leather. Arrows are shot to reach a distance of two hundred paces. Military maneuvers are regulated with the sounds of gongs and drums. The people are brave and can endure hunger, cold and hardships. They love to fight. If they know they are sure to be captured or killed by the enemy, they will kill themselves with their own knives or by drowning themselves in the sea, so the place is called the country of predators. (Chia-pin, 1969: 28)

As can be noted, the observations of the Chinese representative deploy an image of a land that is far from achieving the state of cultural development and refinement of the Chinese Empire. Even with the precautions that should be taken regarding some of the customary hyperbolic language used in official statements in that period, we are faced with a source of great value in capturing a vivid image of the Old Ryūkyūs.<sup>6</sup> A Japanese manuscript from 1268, the *Hyōto Ryūkyūkokoku ki* (“Account of a Passage to the Land of Ryūkyū”) also provides valuable information including most prominently a drawing. The document gathers an expeditionary journey to China sailing in 1243 from Ojikajima, an island between Nagasaki and Jeju, that shipwrecked in the Ryūkyūs due to a great storm. There the travelers witnessed an armed battle among Ryūkyūan peoples using bows, spears, tridents, and shields. Interestingly the Ryūkyūs library webpage, from where this

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<sup>6</sup> The text provides further and remarkably interesting details: “The Country of Liu-ch’iu is situated to the east of Ch’uan-chou, at a distance of five or six days by boat. The king’s family name is Huan-ssu, but the natives style him K’o-lao. The king’s residence is called Po-la-tan Cave. It has a three-fold mound and a palisade surrounded by running water and protected by thorn hedges. The caves of the palace building have many figures of birds and beasts carved upon them. Both males and females bind their hair with white hempen cords which they coil into a knot at the back of the head. They make clothes of different patterns from hempen cloth, with feathers as ornaments. They plait hats of rattan and decorate them with feathers. Their soldiers are armed with weapons of every kind, such as knives, pikes, bows and arrows, and swords. They use drums, and they make buff-coats of bear and leopard skins. The carriage of the chief is carved with figures of wild beasts, and not more than several tens of men walk in front and in the back.” (Chia-pin, 1969: 25).

picture has been gathered, refers to the person in red clothing as a *shogun* or “military commander”.



Figure 1 - Armed battle among Ryūkyūan peoples around the 13th century. Source: *Hyōtō Ryūkyūkoku ki* (Tokyo: Kunaichō shoryōbu, 1962)

The oral tradition of Ryūkyūan history tells that in the last years of the 12<sup>th</sup> century a lord named King Shunten (1166-1237) was capable of unifying for the first time the principal island under his command, and ruled between 1187 and 1237. Shunten is said to be the daughter’s son of the Lord of Osato, a local chieftain (in other stories is the sister), and Minamoto no Tametomo (1139–1170). Minamoto no Tametomo, uncle of the first Kamakura Shogun, Minamoto Yorimoto (1147- 1199), is a historical Japanese hero who had been banned to Oshima island, like many other Taira warriors, after the clan defeat at the battle of Dannoura in 1185. Henceforth in his exile Tametomo allegedly fled (or shipwrecked) to south offshore islands, arriving at the Ryūkyūs.<sup>7</sup> The myth of Tametomo's arrival on the islands of Okinawa is based on the *Hogen monogatari* (1320) the military chronicle of the Hogen Rebellion in Japan (1156), appearing in several stories

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<sup>7</sup> Kajun Higaonna states: “With regard to Minamo-no-Tametomo’s visit to Okinawa from Chinzei (present Kyushu) there is a legend transmitted from generation to generation since old days, in which he is called Yamato-Tametomo and there are arrows with turnip-shaped heads said to be his mementos which are kept at the Sogenji Temple dedicated to King Shunten.” (Higaonna 1950: 5). For the story of Tamemoto and Shunten as written in the *Chuzan Seikan*, first official history of the Ryūkyū Kingdom see pages 5-6. For an extensive list of the Japanese scholars addressing the legend including Fuyu’s *Ryūkyū kokon ni* (1926), and Kanjuns *Ryūkyū no kenkyū* (1952), see: Sakamaki 1967.

and novels, as well as in the research of some of the Okinawan studies fathers: Fuyu Iha (1846-1947) and Kanjun Higaonna (1882-1963). Although demised as a legend, because the destiny of Minamoto no Tametomo and many of the Taira group after the war are unknown, Okinawan historian George Kerr saw some points of veracity in this oral tradition, according to the cultural and social situation in Japan and the Ryūkyūs at the time. The unproven facts were properly adapted and embellished in posterior official accounts, almost invariably deriving from the *Chūzan Seikan* (Mirror of Chūzan), first Ryūkyūan official history written in 1650, when the kingdom was under Satsuma control:

It is a reasonable guess—but only a guess—that at some time in the 12th century roving Japanese fighting men and their retainers came into association with petty chieftains on Okinawa and that one of these chieftains, strengthened by the relationship, emerged as a paramount leader in central Okinawa. The Japanese may well have been exiled Taira men, but when the time came centuries later to prepare a history and adorn the legends (that is to say, in the early 17th century) the de facto rulers of Japan, the Tokugawa shoguns, were of Minamoto stock. What better man to serve as a link between Okinawa and Japan than the legendary Minamoto Tametomo? (Kerr 1958: 50)

Because these official chronicles were written the Satsuma clan had already taken the Ryūkyū Kingdom (1609) they must certainly be considered as politicized texts, either because of imperialist pressure or due to an interest of the Ryūkyūan authorities in highlighting the cultural ties to Japan; or perhaps more accurately as a combination of both reasons. From this perspective, Shunten “Lord of Urasoe” would have been a descendant of the Japanese imperial family and his reign therefore consequential and legitimate to be recorded as official history. The *Chūzan Seikan* acts as a foundational narrative for the Ryūkyūs Kingdom after the 1609 Satsuma invasion and is written almost entirely in Japanese; hence properly it associates the southern islands with the Japanese imperial family and the Tokugawa Shogunate via Minamoto no Tametomo.<sup>8</sup> Today we know that this story is part of the legend, but like any legend, it contains certain resemblances and memories of truths that will be further addressed in chapter 2. Not only Kerr but also researchers as Thomas Nelson (2006: 374) consider the Taira hypothesis to

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<sup>8</sup> Gregory Smits has pointed out how the official accounts of the time, like the *Chuzan Seikan*, responded to diplomatic efforts by part of Ryūkyūs authorities, thus reflecting the dual sovereignty or dial tributary subordination of the Kingdom in relation to Japan and China: “By contrast, Sai On’s 1725 *Chūzan seifu* (Genealogy of Chūzan) was written in Chinese, mainly for the eyes of investiture envoys (*sakuhōshi*, *sappōshi*) from China.” (Smits 2015: 1).

be plausible since the clan refugees reached distant lands like Hokkaido to the north, and to the south the Shogunate extended its control to Tokugoshima in the Amami Islands, just a few kilometers from Okinawa, the Ryūkyūs main island, precisely to discompose the Taira last settlements. Already in 1967 the researcher Shunzo Sakamaki had suggested this possibility, pointing out the closeness of the historical dates ranging from the final defeat of the Taira in the battle of Dannoura (1185) and the establishment of the royal Shunten dynasty in the Ryūkyūs (1187); carrying out a considerably rich analysis in a few pages. As Sakamaki points out, medieval Japanese compilations such as the *Heike Monogatari* (12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century) or the *Genpei Seisuiiki* (13<sup>th</sup> century) are remarkably vague about the fate of the Heike forces defeated at Dannoura, using rather literary formulas such as "complete destruction" (Sakamaki 1967: 117 n.9). The fact is that numerous Taira troops were able to escape during the huge naval battle, and most likely fled in all directions. We must bear in mind that this diaspora of the Taira clan not only involved the movement of specialized warriors but also, as a result of the evacuation of Kyoto before the battle at Dannoura, included their families, servants, sailors and other workers, in addition to many goods such as precious metals, easily transportable thanks to the shipping capacity of the clan. Specifically, Sakamaki believes that the establishment of the Taira with their wealth and commercial, diplomatic, warrior, and maritime skills, could explain the rise and prosperity of the Ryūkyūan *aji* (regional lords), who were incrementally capable of imposing themselves over the land extension of Okinawa island, forming bigger territorial units.

By its part, Okinawan scholar Gregory Smits have recently researched in deep the arrival of the Tatemono legend to the Ryūkyūs and how it channels the archipelago, by migrations that occurred 14<sup>th</sup>, with Kyūshū, the southern part of Japan mainland. The cultural zone of these human groups and their trade networks, as defined by Smits,<sup>9</sup> includes even areas of South Korea and its nearby islands like Jeju:

Tametomo appears in the *Omorō* as "Teda Hachiro," which comes from the title Chinzei Hachirō Tametomo. The Tametomo legend probably dates from the arrival of the Samekawa family from Higo in the late fourteenth century. As Yoshinari Naoki points out, "Higo was a region with deep connections to the Ryūkyū Arc from ancient times. Moreover, it was the knot that connected the Ryūkyū Arc and the Korean peninsula." The ties between Ryūkyū and Higo were extensive. Takase (present day Tamana) on the coast of Higo was the northern

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<sup>9</sup> See Smits 2019a: 27-58.

terminus of a sea route to Fujian in southern China. The route ran through the Ryūkyū islands, and it became especially popular during the fourteenth century as the Hakata-Níngbō route became increasingly dangerous. Hashimoto Yū points out that the shift to the Takase-Fujian route accelerated the development of the Ryūkyū islands. (Smits 2019a: 31).

In the same manner that the kinship relation of King Shunten with the famous Minamoto appears to be more than controversial, the supposed unification of Okinawa under his rule, even with the evident traces of his powerful chiefdom, must be regarded as a backward historical recreation for the Kingdom accounts. The political unity under the command of the legendary royal dynasty initiated by King Shunten broke in 1314, and subsequently determinate *aji* lords were expanding their political ascendancy and military power. Eventually, this would lead to the division of Okinawa in three kingdoms known as Hokuzan (“Northern Mountain”), Chūzan (Central Mountain”), and Nanzan (“Southern Mountain”). Shunten was a king of Chūzan, so most probably his dynasty, established in the central area of Okinawa, coexisted with other regional powers. Those three monarchies had their center at respective big castles (*gusuku*) of Nakijin, Urasoe and Osato and managed respective ports, through which they maintained commercial relations with Japan, China, and Southeast Asia (Sakamaki 1967: 120). At the same time, these three rival monarchies were also eagerly pursuing to establishing diplomatic relations with the Chinese Empire.

This moment of Ryūkyūan history is commonly known as the *Sanzan* (“Three Mountains”) or “Three Kingdoms” period. The karate webpage at the *Wonder Okinawa* site, created under governmental auspices in 2003 and conforming once Japan’s largest local digital archive, asserted that *kobu jutsu* (today’s *kobudō*, meaning “the old ways”, the armed facets of karate) as combat forms systematized to some degree, began during this *Gusuku* period of prolonged warfare between *aji* contending for political sovereignty and monopoly over marine trade:

The martial arts with weaponry (*Kobu jutsu*) started appearing in actual battles during the *Sanzan* (3 kingdoms) period of the 11th and 12th centuries in Okinawa. At that time, the three largest kingdoms - *Nanzan* (*Ozato Aji*), *Hokuzan* (*Nakijin Aji*) and *Chūzan* King (*King Tamagusuku*) - were competing for supremacy, and various weapons, fighting methods, castle construction techniques and other skills were developed. (Okinawa Prefecture. *Wonder Okinawa - Karate and Martial Arts with Weaponry* 2003: n.p.).



Although undoubtedly these three broad divisions existed, for they are recorded in Chinese, Japanese, and Ryūkyūan official documents, Smits sustains that they cannot be determined in the proper sense as kingdoms or territorial states dominating the geopolitical space of Okinawa's main island. Instead, they must be seen as coalitions of local warrior lords, frequently bearing familiar ties. In this sense, I consider that this kind of social and political organization seems to be quite similar to that of the Japanese samurai clan. These unions of *aji* operated to facilitate trade with China, with the most potent ones concentrating in the surrounding areas of the Naha and Tomari ports: “although individual ships left Naha under the auspices of a particular king, prince, or royal relative, any number of local power holders might have contributed to the cargo and have expected eventually to share in the profits.” (Smits 2019a: 84). The articulation of a structure formed by Okinawan *aji*, economic wealth, and maritime Sinosphere is fundamental to understand the creation of the Ryūkyū Kingdom accurately.

## **1.2. Local Kings and Wakō Violence in the Formation of the Ryūkyū Kingdom**

Chinese documents of the 14<sup>th</sup> century record how the same Okinawan envoys appeared as spokesman of different Ryūkyūan kings, depending on the occasion. This fact, thus demonstrating that the trading system with the Ryūkyūs was accommodating different warlords' interests. The title “king” (wáng) in Ming times was a diplomatic and commercial license granted for the participation in the Chinese tributary system. The certificate recognized the holder as ruler of a particular territory with regards to the Chinese interests and under the supremacy of the Emperors; hence although reflexing the extent of the kings as local powers, it did not necessarily mean their control over the country. The titles conceded by the Chinese Empire and taking part in the Chinese tributary system, however, had a considerable influence over other's countries' political realm because trade was a royal monopoly. For example, Japan and Korea tribute relations with Ming, appeared in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century – later than those of the Ryūkyūs and other East Asian states, also served as a form of official recognition between both states: “after Ashikaga Yoshimitsu had been named king of Japan and Yi Bang-won King of Chosun (Korea) in 1402, in the following year both “kings” officially established diplomatic relations between Japan and Korea for the first time” (Yasunori 2001: 120).

As Akamine remembers, the times in which the Ryūkyūs lords were seeking to strengthen their commercial ties with the Middle Empire coincided with an epoch of huge disturbances in the China Sea due to piracy. *Wako* pirates gained huge ascendancy over coastal zones often in connivance with local residents who participated in sea commerce both in legitimate and illegitimate ways. The extent of such powers operating at the margins forced an official ban on trade conducted by private merchants and the reorganization of the imperial tribute system: “The foreign trade necessary for the tribute system came under the control of the imperial court, and foreign travelers and merchants were prohibited from freedom of entry into China.” (Akamine 2016: 6). Under Ming's eyes, therefore, the Ryūkyūs come into being as a new bridge for securing their measures against piracy from 1381 onwards, when the Chinese relations with Japan for controlling the *wako* were in decline:

Ming's policy of preferential treatment towards Ryūkyū [...] was motivated by a desire to nurture a new maritime trading power in a maritime area where there had until then never existed a powerful sovereign power or a country with diplomatic relations with China and to create a “receptacle” for maritime traders such as “Japanese pirates”, who stood outside the existing order [...] once the activities of pirates became more sporadic and no longer posed such a great threat to the Ming, its policy of preferential treatment towards Ryūkyū gradually fell back, and Ryūkyū's tribute trade also came to be subjected to constraints. (Okamoto 2008: 57).

This framing is of the utmost importance. The emergence of the Ryūkyūs as a prime “legal” intermediary in the Asian trade entrepot is explained thanks to the support of the Chinese Empire, which at the same time was a geopolitical measure directly linked with the circumstances of piracy:

Despite one-thousand- and five-thousand- man military encampments stationed there as safeguards, these pirates, beyond the control of the tribute system, showed no signs of slowing their activities. In a move intended to eradicate the pirates and their rapacious pursuit of Chinese trade goods from the coast, Zhū Yuánzhāng designated his new vassal, Ryūkyū, as his official “carrier of goods,” in place of Chinese carriers who were prohibited from sea travel. The emperor provided the ships on which the Ryūkyūans were to transport Chinese wares and thus established for the new state a wide marketplace in which its merchants could ply their trade freely. In so doing, he hoped to deflect at least some of the pirates' attention away from the Chinese coastal areas. (Akamine 2016: 6)

The preferential commercial and diplomatic treatment, unparalleled by any other nation under the Chinese sphere of influence, that from the 14th century onwards received

the Ryūkyūs, transformed the archipelago in an advantageous sea commerce route and hence the ports at the island of Okinawa in a central node for the trading of goods.<sup>10</sup> Quite frequently, medieval Okinawan history is introduced without mentioning the critical role of piracy, as a factor inextricably linked to the flourishing of commerce and the participation in the Chinese trading system, for the development and materialization of the Ryūkyū Kingdom.

Taking into account these determinants and following other historians' works, Smits brings new light on the Sanzan period as a post-facto allegoric formulation. In his most recent work, he reveals how different historical accounts provide contradictory statements and details on the events that surrounded the political and military divisions and unifications between the three Ryūkyūan principalities.<sup>11</sup> Hence Smits supports Ikuta Shigeru's theory about the "Three Kingdoms" narrative as a symbolic creation to uphold and justify in official annals the first monarch of the Ryūkyū Kingdom, Sho Hashi (1371-1439), who effectively unified the main island under his domain. For those authoritative posterior accounts, Sho Hashi embodied the metaphorical qualities of each of the three kingdoms: Chūzan's spiritual power, Hokuzan's military might, and Sanzan's agricultural prosperity. The union of these political, economic, and military skills in the person of the first king of the Ryūkyū Kingdom "mirrors the qualities of the Chinese emperor" (Smits 2019a: 85-86). The Sanzan period is, therefore, an ad-hoc narrative that

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<sup>10</sup> "It is said that During the Ming Dynasty, the sum total [of tributary delegations to China] amounted to 171. However, another study suggests that the total number was more than 300. In any case, it was the highest among all tributary countries. Comparison with the second highest, Vietnam, which sent 89 delegations according to a similar counting method, shows how outstanding this figure was. The outstanding amount itself shows the good treatment of the Ryūkyū Kingdom by the Ming Dynasty." (Arano 2001: 26).

<sup>11</sup> "Consider the purported unification of the three principalities by Shō Hashi's military campaigns. Reflections on Chūzan contains a lengthy passage claiming that in 1423, Shō Hashi sent an envoy to the Ming court. The envoy's letter explained that for a century Ryūkyū had been divided into three regions at war with each other, much to the detriment of the common people. Grieving for their sake, Shō Hashi launched military campaigns to pacify Sannan and Sanhoku, whose kings indulged in luxurious living and militarism. Reflections then reports that the emperor replied, praising Shō Hashi for raising a "righteous army" and relieving the people of their misery. Setting aside the formulaic Chinese tropes, the key point is that there are no extant Chinese records from the 1420s indicating that anyone informed the Ming court of the unification of Ryūkyū's three principalities. It appears that this purported act of reporting to the Chinese court took place only within the seventeenth-century pages of Reflections." (Smits 2019a: 79).

served to fit Ryūkyūan history into Chinese worldview patterns better,<sup>12</sup> and support the place of the Ryūkyūs under the trading system:

In Ikuta's view, the apparent flourishing and fall of the three principalities mainly reflected fluctuations in the population of resident Chinese capable of handling tribute trade. Shō Hashi eventually consolidated all of the tribute trade into his hands, probably with the assistance of powerful resident Chinese. It is likely, then, that the consolidation or unification of the three principalities was more a reorganization of the tribute trade than a result of military campaigns between the armies of three different states. (Smits 2019a: 81)

Accordingly, the Ryūkyū Kingdom nascence was not so much the result of an intense civil war between *aji* and the raise of a virtuous king bringing the attention of the Chinese towards the islands, but the implementation of imperial regional politics. Both Akamine's considerations about the role of *wako* piracy and the Chinese necessity of bringing new measures to its trade system, and Smits research about the political unification of Okinawa into a state as a consequence mainly of an administrative reform sponsored by influential Chinese shed light to this conclusion. This conclusion does not in any way imply that armed struggles involving *aji* and *wako* were not happening on the Ryūkyūan islands. On the contrary, the Chinese empire necessitated a central power in the Ryūkyūs hence confirming a considerable turmoil situation that required to be addressed. From this perspective, the Chinese intervention on the political affairs, power alliances, and maritime business among local lords in Okinawa, driven by the state of piracy conforms the proper setting to understand and analyze the emergence of the Ryūkyū Kingdom as a trade entrepot in the East Asian maritime commerce sphere.

The political integration of Okinawa island occurred when the struggle between the so-called “tree kingdoms” came finally to an end in 1429. Sho Hashi, lord of *Chūzan*, controlled the trading scheme with the assistance of the Chinese middlemen concentrated in the Naha port areas. The King of Chūzan was already the most powerful ruler in terms of sea commerce, and the Min maritime ban restrictions further weakened the market

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<sup>12</sup> Smits offers more examples of Shō Hashi's encomiastic memorialization at the Chuzan Seikan: “In the classical Chinese manner of writing history, Shō Shōken described Shō Hashi as a virtuous ruler who brought order to a chaotic Okinawa. Indeed, Shō Hashi ‘went hungry himself when the people were starving and suffered cold himself when the people were cold.’ One might wonder how severely the people of Okinawa suffered from the cold, but such language was boilerplate praise [...] By contrast, the king of Sannan frequently hosted ‘large, drunken pleasure banquets’ and was without decorum or loyalty.” (Smits 2010: 2).

position of his competitors: “the numbers of Ryūkyūan delegations to Ming until 1429, when the king of Chūzan Sho Hashi unified Ryūkyū, were as follows: Chūzan sent 42 delegations, Nanzan 24, and Hokuzan 11” (Yasunori 2001: 26). Kreiner also regards this unification “as a direct result of the connection with China” (2001: 4), which would be followed by the most prosperous stage of the Ryūkyūs history in old times often labeled as the golden age of Ryūkyū Kingdom (1429-1609). For over two hundred years, Naha port was a central node of trans-shipment in the East Asian maritime commerce, especially for exotic and luxury goods as precious metals, beautiful textiles, high-quality porcelain, ivory, incenses, as well as rare plants and animals. These items were brought by rare foreigners with bizarre dressings, languages, and customs who stood at the island for some time. Such a conspicuous display of cultural and material diversity contrasted heavily with the scant natural resources of the Ryūkyūs and the extent of local production, with perhaps the exception of sulfur highly demanded for gunpowder manufacturing. The extraordinary profits of sea commerce brought unprecedented wealth to the islands:

Japanese scholars estimate that the Okinawan merchants occasionally earned a thousand-percent return on shipments of luxury goods. The maritime risks were terribly high, but they were worth it; the economic alternative was an unremitting and unrewarding struggle to wrest something from the harsh soil of Okinawa itself. As a consequence, the hinterland was neglected, and all the energies of the tiny kingdom were centered on the Naha trade. (Kerr 1958: 99).

Although the Ryūkyū Kingdom officially starts with the reign of Sho Hashi, Sho Shin (1477–1527) was the first king to institute a centralized state and a bureaucratic government with well-developed structures. *Shuri* castle and the surrounding urban areas were the capital, administrative, and cultural center of the country. King Sho Shin consolidated his supremacy in Okinawa and expanded the kingdom’s military and cultural domain to neighboring islands like the north Amami-Oshima archipelago and the south Yaeyama - Miyako. After conquering these lands, the Ryūkyūan state exerted control in their overseas trade, imposed taxes, homogenized religious rites, and favored new social hierarchies. The consolidation and development of this maritime space and shipping networks by military conquest and centralized power conforms an empire rather than a kingdom (Smits 2019b: 2).

As I have pointed Sho Shin mandate also coincides with the apogee of the Ryūkyūs trade that nonetheless began to decline several years before the Satsuma

Invasion. It did due to critical geopolitical changes: the arrival of European merchants, the crescent unification of Japan, new Chinese regulations on commerce, that prompted further changes in the configuration of the maritime networks that affected the Ryūkyūs situation broadly. I will later delve into these events. For now, it is necessary to focus on how Sho Shin's regime, aided by the dominant Chinese brokers and merchants residing in Okinawa, developed an extensive commercial system. The Ryūkyū Kingdom acted as the leading official trade intermediary for the Chinese Empire exchange of goods, received financing and forged commercial links not only with Japan and Korea,<sup>13</sup> but also with numerous Southeast Asian kingdoms as Siam (1425-1570), Palembang (1428-1440), Java (1430-1442), Malacca (1463-1511), Atjeh (1463-1468), Patani (1490-1543), Annam 1509, or Sunda (1513-1518) as accounts the *Rekidai Hoan*. First compiled between 1697-8, the *Rekidai Hoan* ("Precious Documents of Successive Generations") is a Ryūkyūan collection of documents, written in Chinese, detailing Ryūkyūan overseas voyages to China, Korea, and eight Southeast Asian countries between 1424-1867, hence covering almost 450 years of both investiture and trade missions. Thanks to the *Reikidai Hoan* we know that Siam was the main commercial partner of the Ryūkyūs in Southeast Asia (Gunn 2011:220), a region to where the Ryūkyūans brought Japanese silver, swords, and gold dust along with many Chinese goods like porcelain and minted coins; in exchange, the ships imported back a prized cargo of spices, sappanwood, sugar, and silks. Siam is particularly of interest. Already in 1958, George Kerr indicated the South Asian is country as a source for fighting traditions in the Ryūkyūs: "It is noteworthy that songs, dances, and festival sports incorporated many elements which came from overseas in the high days of Chūzan trade in the Eastern Sea; boxing (*karate*) in which both hands and feet are used had come from Indo-China or Siam"(Kerr 1958: 217). Unfortunately, Kerr did not contribute with greater detail or additional references for his statement regarding karate. Be that as it may, over the years, his claim has come to be supported by Patrick McCarthy, the most reputed anglophone karate researcher. McCarthy has studied in the

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<sup>13</sup> "From 1389, Ryūkyū commenced sending tribute goods to Korea, namely sappanwood and pepper, imported from Siam, along with sulfur and horses. But not all of this tribute trade was direct. Much of it, having been imported from Ryūkyū by merchant circles of Hakata and Sakai, was carried on the Korean-bound ships of Japanese *daimyo*, powerful Kyushu clan chiefs, merchants, and others. Until 1590, when Ryūkyū tribute entered Korea via Beijing, Japanese ships often carried Ryūkyūan envoys, knowing that they would get better treatment in the disposal of their private trade goods" (Gunn 2011: 2019).

strong possibility of Siamese boxing (today's Muay Thai) as one of Okinawan karate main antecessors:

I am inclined to agree with Kerr's observation and believe that *Ti-gwa* – defined as the striking portion of Okinawan Karate- comes down to us from old-school Siamese boxing [aka *Muay Boran*] and not *kung fu* [i.e. *Quanfa*], the fighting art I have previously identified as the original Chinese source from which *kata* came. [...] In spite of the many remarkable fighting traditions I found in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, etc., none seemed to resemble the simplicity of *Ti'gwa*. The only other culture in which I could locate a tradition of similar qualities, within reasonable geographical proximity and contemporary historical timeframes, was the old Kingdom of Siam and its ancient art of boxing, *Muay Boran*. (McCarthy 2013: n.p.).<sup>14</sup>

Kerr's and McCarthy's asseverations are fundamental to support one of the main arguments of this thesis that is to ponder the influence of Chinese martial arts on Ryūkyūan fighting methods to better address the problem of karate as a Japanese's or non-Japanese martial art. The mere assumption of karate as deriving directly or exclusively from Chinese martial traditions of this medieval period is a misguided notion. This myth, however, is an enduring conception that lies in turn in other myths, several half-truths, and I will later argue modern and contemporary political pressures. As we are observing, the extent of commercial relations and knowledge transfers of the Ryūkyū Kingdom reached frontiers far beyond that of the Chinese Empire, precisely thanks to the tributary system. It is undoubted that during this epoch the Ryūkyūs operated as China's most favored tributary state developing remarkably close diplomatic and cultural ties with the empire. The Kingdom benefited from a unique treatment that allowed the sending of delegations to China one or even two times a year. This highly codified exchange was commercial and ceremonial, entailing a considerable acculturation for the Ryūkyūan officials and ruling elites in diplomatic rituals and administrative tasks. The adequacy of Ryūkyūan embassies to Chinese standards was such that in 1554 the Kingdom received an imperial gift in the form of a plaque with an inscription that read *Shurei no kuni*

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<sup>14</sup> McCarthy recognizes four empty-handed martial disciplines being “the true source from which *Karate* traces its origins”. They are: *tegumi* or native wrestling/sumo with Chinese influences dating “to the time of Tamemoto”; *torite* or Chinese *qinna*, a hand method of subduing by luxation and pressure points “vigorously embraced by law enforcement officials, security agencies and correctional officers during Okinawa's old Ryūkyū Kingdom Period”; *kata* or routine forms drawn mainly from Fujianese martial art styles; and *Ti'gwa* or *te* “Okinawan plebeian form of percussive impact”. (McCarthy 2013).

(“Country of Propriety”), and that was exalted on one of the Shuri palace gates. Still, there has been a certain tendency to overstate the reach of the Chinese culture in the Ryūkyūs, especially before the Satsuma overtake in 1609. Written sources demonstrate that in their formal contacts with Japan, since early stages, the Ryūkyūan kings used Japanese language, a choice that broke with the protocolary use of Chinese in international relations: “The Japanese, for their part, drafted their letters to the Ryūkyūan king in kana script, again a huge break with protocol. Their correspondence indicates that the Japanese and Ryukyuans saw their ties as lying outside the China-centered structure that dominated their relations with all other states.” (Nelson 2006: 370-371)

In my opinion, the pro-Chinese bias, affecting the overall of Okinawan culture, continues to equally instill and be instilled by one of the founding myths of karate: the famous arrival of the 36 Chinese Families in 1392. Allegedly this group of experts brought with them many knowledges to the Ryūkyūs, including martial arts. Much of the popular Ryūkyūan history of that time is conveniently fabricated by dismissing any social and cultural process that occurred outside the margins of official records, of which in the case of the Ryūkyūs, as I have noted and will further explore with more detail, were often compiled beyond the 17<sup>th</sup> century. On top of that, and quite frequently, those sources’ information has been subjected to the fallacy of selective choice and or incomplete evidence. Unappealing as it may be, the primary function of the Ryūkyūan relationship with China was not cultural even in the case of royal embassies. As Kreiner reminds such delegations “meant an extraordinarily good flux of information, but first and foremost, the best trade opportunities.” (Kreiner 2001: 4). In these regards, another of the most persuasive arguments wielded is that official trade was a real privilege, which is the case; but such statement is presented like straightforwardly implying that sea commerce was perfectly controlled and inaccessible to private merchants, pirates and smugglers, which is not the case. Precisely due to the extreme strength of those illegal activities the Chinese empire decreed the maritime ban, in fact, several and successive bans (1368-1567), hence demonstrating the government limitations in their execution. As Gunn States in *History without borders: The making of an Asian world region, 1000-1800*, during the 15<sup>th</sup> century “even in the face of Ming restrictions on overseas trade, certain ports on the remote Fujian coast emerged as clandestine smuggling headquarters, supporting a lively



maritime commerce.” (Gunn 2011: 112). Illegal trade was so profitable that still among strictly controlled ports constituted part of everyday life.

Nevertheless, for now, let us return to the place of the Ryūkyū Kingdom as a powerful conduit to Southeast Asian countries, a commercial and maritime empire that “built the magnificent Silk Road of the Sea” (Akamine 2016: 7). Perhaps the most famous appellation for the Ryūkyūs in this golden age of sea trade is that of “The bridge between the myriad lands” inscribed in the famous bell *Bankoku shinryo no kane* cast in 1458 (Koji 2008: 79). On this basis, driven by the increased intercultural contacts with other countries, and with Naha port functioning as a knowledge node permeated by traders, merchants, artisans, monks, and diplomats, the Ryūkyūs culture flourished. A distinctive and sophisticated royal court elite culture in Shuri was developed, mixtured by a corpus of customs that incorporated primarily elements of the folk tradition as well as Chinese and Japanese influences. Discrete Okinawan arts, architectures, ritual performances flourished, a newly structured state with administrative divisions, written documents, and an official religion with temples and monuments appeared. The reach of these cultural forces, naturally, in origin and result, trespassed the limits of the Shuri district and the elite classes. Increasingly and both in formal and informal ways, at the official and private domains, the inhabitants of the Ryūkyūs where building intercultural ties with Chinese and Japanese communities residing in Okinawa.

On the other hand, the Ryūkyūs peoples traveling overseas had to stay in foreign ports for prolonged periods due to the seasonal determinants of sea voyages, exchange goods bureaucracies, price negotiations, and etcetera. Thus, Ryūkyūans visiting other East Asian territories established their first intercultural exchanges outside and prior to the formal settling of a royal tribute system with the Chinese empire. Recall how the Ryūkyūan *aji* began to send emissaries to China in 1372, ahead of the Kingdom’s unification and the standardization of a trading and political relationship. Another example is the commercial relationship between the Ryūkyūs and Siam that goes at least back to the decade of 1380, interceded by Chinese intermediaries living in Siam (Gunn 2011: 2020). Over time and along with the growing institutionalization of the orthodox trading relationships, official residences destined to the members of Ryūkyūan tributary missions, like the Rai’en’eki in Quanzhou, and permanent Ryūkyūan settlements known as the ‘Ryūkyū House’ (Ryūkyūkan) in Fuzhou port, and in the Satsuma domain were

founded.<sup>15</sup> These houses steadily evolved as cultural outposts and areas of interaction that exceed their primary functions for merchantry. The Rykyukan in Fuzhou, for instance, hosted a printing house, or rituals and memorial services for the deceased members of the missions (Akamine 2016: 111, 124), a recurrent circumstance because sea travel was full of dangers like storms and diseases, beyond pirates. However, it would be an illusion to think that social interactions were confined to the boundaries of those designated buildings. If we cannot transport our nation-states mindset, the modern idea of political maps defined by clear frontiers, to the maritime and membrane coastal zones of East Asia in this golden age of maritime commerce, neither we cannot think of peoples' everyday activities, social stratus, or exchange facilities like markets and temples as watertight compartments. It would be illogical to assume that the informal and unaccounted interrelations between groups and individuals did not overpass by large those that are available to us through documentation in contemporary times.

Take, for example, the ships taking part in the first period of the Ryūkyū Kingdom tributary missions. The vessels were Chinese loans pertaining to coastal military fortifications that during Ming times could bear up to five thousand soldiers to protect the coasts from the terrifying *wako*. At the large tribute watercrafts, along the specialized personnel formed by chief navigators, officers and soldiers, supplied mainly by the Chinese, the passage and crew were composed private merchants, monks, and many adventurous seamen of diverse origins. Extant historical documents too give testimony on the overtures and limits of administrative regulations. For example, we know that in 1472 the court authorities in Fujian had to proclaim and circulate a returning order for the Ryūkyūans who were establishing their residence in Fuzhou,<sup>16</sup> after arriving via tribute missions:

By 1472, the Fujian provincial offices were jointly complaining that 'Previously, the *yi* persons of the country of Ryūkyū had come to offer tribute, but surreptitiously stayed in the inner territory. Gradually, they established families and started enterprises, and long did not return to their home country. It is requested that they all be sent back.' (Wade 2007: 12)

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<sup>15</sup> "Originally, Ryūkyū's port of entry was at Quanzhou, but its legations were not held to this and frequently arrived instead at Fuzhou to the north, or at Ningbo or Rui'an in Zhejiang Province. The Ryūkyūans even had a compound at Rui'an, the Tōan Kan'eki [Dong'an Station], built for the use of their envoys and legations." (Akamine 2016: 29).

<sup>16</sup> "those who were able to list their names in the Chinese family registry were completely absorbed into Chinese society, and the rest were punished with deportation." (Akamine 2016: 46).

Actually, it was difficult to discern if those members of the personnel were native Ryūkyūans, Chinese Ryūkyūans (Akamine 2016: 46), or just foreign peoples on board. Around that time, the frequent unruly behavior of Ryūkyūan tributary missions' members to China brought plentiful of problems, which resulted in Chinese restraints in terms of crew and private goods to be on board. Generally, such measures had constrained impact as the inspectors were recurrently unable to make the difference between permitted and smuggled merchandise. In turn, the demand for goods rose well above the legal supply that official missions could provide, henceforth not only small-scale smuggling occurred. Corruption involving military officials and Chinese administrators was nowhere near rare: "This reached such a level in 1501 that imperial orders were issued to preclude the military officials and eunuchs based in Fujian from taking excessive cuts from the trade goods being taken into China by the Ryūkyūan envoys." (Wade 2007: 13).<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, some of the Ryūkyūan demeanor in Fujian was so out of the line that caused violent disorders: "In Fuzhou, where tribute ships came and went freely, there was a gradual unraveling of public order. Violence would frequently break out after disputes over the foreign trade, and tribute envoys and their personnel often engaged in a remarkable degree of misconduct." (Akamine 2016: 45). One of the most notorious examples happened in 1473, motivating a change in Ming limitation on the cycle of tributes from one per year to one every two years, and the prohibition of private trade in tribute missions after repeated scandals. Members of the Ryūkyūan delegation killed a matrimony of commoners in Huai'an prefecture, stole their properties, and set the house on fire (Yasunori 2001: 127; Akamine 2016: 46). On other occasions, some of the missions' crew were identified by the Chinese authorities being Fujianese outlaws that had avoided detention and refugeed in the Ryūkyūs (Akamine 2016: 47).

As we have seen in this section local warlords, sea entrepreneurs (relying equally upon legal, illegal and violent methods), official traders, government authorities, pirates and smugglers, all mixed together, are perhaps the defining factors to understand the conception and evolution of the Ryūkyūs as a maritime empire. Those collectives

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<sup>17</sup> "The *MSL [Ming Shi-lu]* records various examples of non-official trade or attempts to circumvent official restraints by the Ryūkyūan envoys to the Ming. In one example from 1470, we see Cheng Peng, a Ryūkyūan envoy of Chinese descent, being arrested for bribing and engaging in smuggling with a military official in Fuzhou. The military officer was punished, while Cheng Peng was pardoned." (Wade 2007: 13).

associated for the shake of profits, monopolies, and statuses, sometimes so intimately that it was difficult to differentiate their occupations and dispositions in the social space. Besides, still being the case, we have to take into account that, mirroring what happens nowadays, it is possible, not to mention often, to hold a privileged social position and participate in illegal (or if preferred paralegal) activities; because of the incentives precisely granted by this hierarchical structure of power, that makes the relationship between reward and punishment inversely proportional. Under no circumstances must be understood that such little praiseworthy characteristics are privative of the Ryūkyūs history. On the contrary, to acknowledge them is to normalize in the best sense possible Okinawa as a historical entity. By evident reasons, this historiography is quite unfitting to a garnished narrative of the Ryūkyū Kingdom as reconstructed and depicted extensively today in media, academia, and tourism. The Ryūkyūs of the past are re-imagined as a unique peaceful land of righteous lords, illustrious scholars, proficient bureaucrats, and glorious merchants. Smits recent book *Maritime Ryūkyū*, based on primary sources and non-anglophone research, supposes an extremely valuable rupture with the quasi univocal romanticized view of the Kingdom. As he recognizes:

Maritime Ryūkyū is a revisionist history. The Ryūkyū depicted in its pages looks significantly different from the Ryūkyū portrayed by George H. Kerr, the Ryūkyū in typical Japanese survey histories, or the Ryūkyū of the official histories. In *Maritime Ryūkyū*, for example, *wakō* (armed mariners prone to marauding) are the major actors in most previous work on early Ryūkyūan history. [...] Stated simply, the Ming court made trade through Naha highly profitable to provide an incentive to the *wakō* (pirates) who controlled local power centers in the Ryūkyū islands to interact with China lawfully. (Smits 2019b: 2, 4).

Henceforth, and attending to the exhaustive sociohistorical research of the early Ryūkyū Kingdom at our disposal, I argue that concurrently it is difficult to picture completely the evolution of the Ryūkyūs fighting systems and karate antecessors without mind these, let us say, barely dignifying past. A past plagued of outcasts, illiterate warriors, soldiers, hustlers, peasants, small merchants, *wako*, and peoples living at the margins of the political and cultural centers. Sadly, written shreds of evidence from those populations are noticeably scant, being Okinawa a blatant case. Thus, we have to rely on anecdotes found in official annals, oral history, indirect sources, and well-grounded inferences thanks to disciplines like comparative cultural history and archeology, which

for the Ryūkyūs is shedding priceless light, as we will have the occasion to further observe in this thesis.

### 1.3. Kingdom without Weapons or Maritime Empire?

The military system of the Ryūkyū Kingdom, as is the case for karate, has deserved very little to near no attention for Okinawan Studies. Very fortunately for this thesis unfolding and outcome, Gregory Smits's 2019 book covers the matter extensively. The Okinawan studies scholar provides several descriptions of early Kingdom warfare encounters, antipirate maneuvers, and the type of weapons and organization used by the military forces of the archipelago. For example, he documents the presence of the Ryūkyūs military in historical accounts like the Chinese *Ming shi lu* and the Okinawan *Rekidai Hoan* (Smits 2019a: 182-183). By its part, Okamoto cites a passage in the Korean *Choson wangjo sillok* where drifted ashore Koreans are explained by the Ryūkyūan escorts sailing them back home that, around 1460, an Office of the Commander-General of the Five Armies (*gogun toseifu*) existed in the Ryūkyūs (Okamoto 2008: 54).

In consequence, despite some historian's insistence of, as I will later illustrate, on sustaining that the Ryūkyū Kingdom held no significant or organized armed force, documented facts point in the opposite direction. *Wako* and many regional powers were competing fiercely at the perilous East Asian seas and coasts from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Being the Ryūkyūs a preeminent maritime route for connecting north and south East Asia all along the Kuroshio current, dotted with a myriad of small islands could serve as pirate bases, without the capacity to forcefully confront such actors the construction of the Kingdom would have been just impossible. Furthermore, that period witnessed a military revolution, accentuated by new fire weapons technologies that spread correlatively to the great age of commerce (Wade 2007: 33).<sup>18</sup> It is necessary to explain,

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<sup>18</sup> “Sun Laichen has also written widely on the gunpowder age and how it affected East Asia. There is, however, no evidence from the MSL [*Ming Shi-lu*] that any of the Ryūkyū polities was a major user of firearms at this time, despite being one of the major suppliers of a major gunpowder component – Sulphur- throughout the period being examined. It would certainly not, however, be surprising if other evidence does show that the Hokkien [Fujian] network or other trade links saw firearms being traded into Ryūkyū from the 14th century, or that they were used in the consolidation of political power by the Zhong-shan state.” (Wade 2007: 33) Certainly there were firearms in the Ryūkyūs, but at the time of that military revolution and the Satsuma overtake, they were scarce and outdated.

however, to be fair, that the economic decline of the Ryūkyū Kingdom by the shift on the regional structure of trading in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century, prompted an incapacity to upgrade military technology and supplies, which by 1609 were considerably inferior to that of the Satsuma clan of Japan. In the century that preceded the Satsuma assault the Kingdom struggled to maintain law and order at his main port in Naha. This weakness came out to justify in the eyes of the Shogunate the urgent need to control the Ryūkyūs, southern border of Japan.

For the moment, let us concentrate on the formation of the Kingdom. I had referred how Sho Hashi commonly receives the credit to have been the first Ryūkyūan king by gathering considerable power under his rule, although he did not completely integrated the island of Okinawa. The *Chūzan Seikan* describes how Sho Hashi led a grueling war against the king on the north: “the Chūzan forces outmaneuvered the enemy and their arrows ‘fell upon them like rain.’ Another fight involving 200 defenders of a northern castle and 500 Chūzan attackers ‘stained the grass with blood, and corpses sprawled along the roadway’.” (Smits 2010: 2). By its part Sho Shin’s (r. 1477-1527) who achieved the effective centralization of the Kingdom and imposed an administrative architecture, accessed to the throne not by a peaceful succession but by means of a violent uprising, a regularity in the 15<sup>th</sup> century Ryūkyūs. The consolidation of the Kingdom in Okinawa island and the expansion of its frontiers to north and south adjacent archipelagos were nothing but armed campaigns:

Shō Shin struggled for supremacy and legitimacy throughout his long reign. Military campaigns included local warfare not appearing in the official histories, as well as invasions of Yaeyama in 1500, Kumejima (1506 and possibly earlier), and continuing military tensions in Sakishima that included an invasion of Yonaguni around 1522 (or earlier) by forces at least nominally allied with Shuri. (Smits 2019a: 136).

The year on 1525 (or perhaps 1526) saw the forced relocation of the most powerful *aji*, required to abandon their castles for residing in the whereabouts of Shuri, the primary locus of power, obtaining nobility titles in exchange. Those *aji* owned their private armies and ships and nurtured trading networks, thus supposing a considerable menace to any Shuri king. Sho Shin measure was accompanied by a decree mandating the collection of all weapons to be put under the royal domain on a government armory. The policy functioned both for the pacification and monopolization of the Ryūkyūs warfare potential

while creating a state aristocracy. Here we find a neat example of what the sociologist Norbert Elias (1939) explained as a civilizing process for the state formation, in other words, the restraint of warring feudal passions by the successful violent imposition of a coercive monopoly on military power.<sup>19</sup>

Smits makes a crucial point regarding such a cardinal and transformative process of the Ryūkyūs history: the relocation of the *aji* to Shuri is not mentioned in any monument or official accounts until the *Chūzan Seifu* (1725) where is presented briefly and neutral: “histories routinely present this relocation as a simple fact, but we have no indication that it happened as a discrete, orderly event [...] Even there [at the *Chūzan Seifu*], the claim occurs with no explanation, only in the introductory material, and not under a specific year.” (Smits 2019a: 137). The karate instituted discourse reproduces exactly this a-conflictual narrative, like correspondingly implying that the compulsory cession of power and disarmament of regional lords was a non-violent harmonious affair. Against this background, we can observe how the continuous (auto)performance of Okinawa as a historical peaceful land, of which karate is a major symbolic device, is not a 20<sup>th</sup> century creation but a longlasting recreation that reaches to our days. In 2019 the Okinawa Karate Information Center webpage reproduced partially a series of articles that appeared at the Ryūkyū Shimpō newspaper section culture one year before. According to these texts, Sho Shin confiscation is doubted because the Ryūkyūs had no armed groups or military system, and Ryūkyūan regional lords (*aji*) and nobles actually disregarded weapons. What is more, there was no necessity of using such methods, for the Kingdom was peaceful:

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<sup>19</sup> “The difference between the situation of the free feudal nobility and that of the courtly nobility is an example of this. In the former, the social power of the individual house, a function of both its economic and military capacity and of the physical strength and skill of the individual, determines the allocation of resources; and in this free competition the direct use of force is indispensable. In the latter, the allocation of resources is finally determined by the man whose house or whose predecessors have emerged victoriously from the struggle by violence, so that he now possesses the monopoly of force. Owing to this monopoly, the direct use of force is now largely excluded from the competition among the nobility for the opportunities the prince has to allocate. The means of struggle have been refined or sublimated. The restraint of the affects imposed on the individual by his dependence on the monopoly ruler has increased. And individuals now waver between resistance to the compulsion to which they are subjected, hatred of their dependence and unfreedom, nostalgia for free knightly rivalry, on the one hand, and pride in the self-control they have acquired, or delight in the new possibilities of pleasure that it opens, on the other. In brief, this is a new spurt in the civilizing process.” (Elias 2000: 274-275). Regarding the Ryūkyūan case Smits (2019a: 137) perfectly synthesizes: “Before Shō Shin, kings of Ryūkyū resembled powerful *wakō* chieftains. After Shō Shin, they resembled Chinese-style heads of a centralized bureaucracy”.

If you do not clarify the distinction from the “sword hunt” in Japanese history, it can lead to a misunderstanding. In Japanese history, there was a sword hunt in Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s era. However, weapons were not taken away from samurai, but from peasants (farmers) in order to clarify the distinction of social status. In the case of Ryūkyū, it is said that weapons were taken away from ‘Aji’ which are regarded as ‘Samurai.’ So, were weapons really taken away from Aji? Originally, there was no organized armed group in Ryūkyū. While it is undeniable that there must have been some weapons, it is most likely that they were no important items for Aji. From the fact that there was really no weapon stocked, it is hard to believe that the weapons’ recall was written out as an achievement of King Shō Shin. (Okinawa Karate Information Center 2019: n.p.).<sup>20</sup>

At the same, however, the official discourse makes of this stowaway one of the three fundamental underpinnings of karate, prompting its evolution from old fighting methods to civil hand-combat technique: “The origin of karate traces back to the time of King Shō Shin (1477-1526), when Aji local rulers were gathered to reside in the surrounding of Shuri Castle, and a sword hunt occurred. It was also influenced by the weapon prohibition enforced following the invasion of Ryūkyū by Satsuma in 1609.” (Okinawa Karate Information Center 2017a: n.p.). The source cited for this origin theory is a 1994 survey among researchers conducted by the Okinawa Prefecture Board of Education and published the next year in the book *Okinawa Karate ‘Kobudō’ Graph* (1995: 3).<sup>21</sup> Just by attending to these passages it becomes manifest how karate’s discourse cementation, as an inherently pacifist martial art mirroring the history and essence of Okinawa, must face in its bosom not few contradictions; because it is notably challenging to ground historically a tradition of fighting methods without a context of necessity.

Evidence derived from the development and maturation of Okinawan studies, notwithstanding, begin to make it difficult to sustain the non-weapons argument. In rigor it must be said that early fathers of Okinawan studies as Fuyu Iha had researched, yet in the 1930s, the organization of the Ryūkyū Kingdom military structure including some

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<sup>20</sup> The source for the OKIC note is a series of articles that appeared in 2018 at the Ryūkyū Shinpo Newspaper section of culture by Professor Yasuo Kurima emeritus professor at Okinawa International University, published by the title “Easy to understand Okinawan history - Interpreting social changes.”

<sup>21</sup> The other two possible ancestors for karate reported by the prefectural work, that constitute the actual canon, are the indigenous “*ti*” and the Chinese martial arts thought to have been introduced at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.



explorations karate cultural basis.<sup>22</sup> In the times of Sho Shin reign, in parallel to the royal seizure of weapons, the *hiki* system was created. *Hiki*, literally meaning “pulling together”, were polyfunctional clusters of “government workers with multiple functions as guards, soldiers, religious workers, civil engineers, and construction workers.” (Smits 2019a: 164). For Okamoto such groups “organically combined administration, overseas trade, and military organization” (Okamoto 2008: 55). Shipping system and military system were two axis of the same structure and thus units forming the *hiki* system were named after sea posts and vessels. Moreover, the *hiki* metaphorically and organizationally acted as a “terrestrial seagoing ship” modelled over “the setup for sea voyages” (Okamoto 2008: 55), resonating with the intimate blend of commerce and warfare in the East Asian maritime sphere. The systemic analogy between sea ships and war blocks seems to be an import of Chinese methods, for the vessels had proper noun names: “The ships given to Ryūkyū by the Ming were mainly those belonging to various garrisons in Fukien. There were thirteen garrisons in Fukien Province, and each garrison consisted of five *ch'ien-hu-so* or units of troops (one *ch'ien-hu-so* had 1,120 troops).” (Kobata, Mitsugo 1969: 58 n.6).<sup>23</sup>

The exigency of maintaining the *hiki* complex raised both from offensive and defensive needs. When the Satsuma invasion was about to happen the main Ryūkyūan port was fortified and defended by cannons artillery. The *hiki* groups could organize a defensive force of around three thousand armed men: “during the years just before 1609, Ryūkyū had been storing up weapons and making some preparations for warfare. Its arsenal included bows, arrows, swords, pikes, halberds, and small-bore personal firearms. Ryūkyūan forces also possessed armor, cavalry horses, and signal banners.” (Smits 2019a: 191). However, compared to the Chinese and Japanese capabilities, made from advanced metal weapons and firearm technologies, Ryūkyūan armaments palliated.

The interwoven relations between piracy and trade provides a concomitant framework to review the state of armaments affaires in the Ryūkyū Kingdom. *Wako* made

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<sup>22</sup> Iha, F. (1974). *Ko-Ryūkyū no bubi o kōsatsushite karate no hattatsu ni oyobu*, published in *Iha Fuyū zenshū* vol 5. Hattori Shirō, Nakasone Masayoshi, Hokama Shuzen (eds.), 196-215. Heibonsha [1932]; and *Ko-Ryūkyū no ‘hiki seido’ ni tsuite-Ryūkyū bunka no ranjukuki ni kansuru ichi kōsatsu*. In *Zenshū*, vol. 9, 279-322 [1935].

<sup>23</sup> The name’s Chinese ships granted were kept and used in the Ryūkyūs in during the 15<sup>th</sup> century. On the other hand, the ships that were built in the Ryūkyūs had often Ryūkyūan names using the term -maru reproducing the Japanese practice in naming ships, in existence since the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

use of weapons to loot properties, assault ships, and capture slaves, and while raising defensive needs also engaged in trading activities. Recall that Ming Empire sought to displace the center of attention from its coasts to the Ryūkyūs as part of its anti-piracy measures by promoting a new entrepot. This made that besides all kinds of luxury goods, both weapons and human traffic also took part at the Naha market: “Ryūkyū was involved in the pirates’ trade in human beings. It was the Ming court’s plan that Naha should become a rich trade market that would attract the pirates and encourage them to sell their captives there.” (Akamine 2016: 30-31).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> “Once Ryūkyū had embarked upon tributary exchanges with China, it became a gathering place for pirates in search of Chinese merchandise. Furthermore, Chinese smugglers, circumventing the ocean travel ban in their quest for high profits, appeared in the Ryūkyūan archipelago, sailing from island to island and conducting their clandestine business. People taken in pirate raids were also offered for sale at a slave market in Naha.” (Akamine 2016: 30).

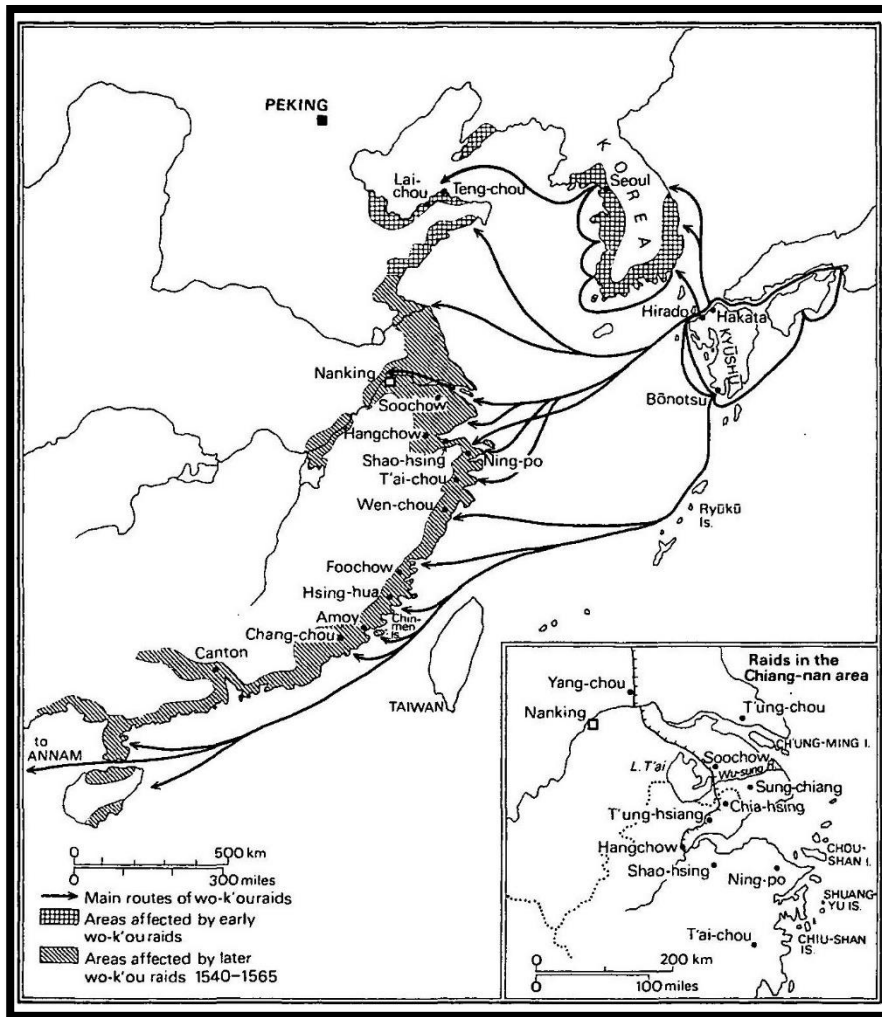


Figure 2 - Pirate routes passing through the Ryūkyūs and zones of the East Asian Coasts affected by wakō raids in the 16th century. Observe how the Ryūkyūs are a mandatory transient area towards South China and South East Asia. Source: *The Cambridge History of China. Vol. 7, The Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644, Part I*, 1988: 4

That weapons constituted one of the main goods traded by Ryūkyūan merchants has been known for long time (Kerr 1958: 126). Preserved accounts like the *Rekidai Hoan* testify the presence of swords, spears, and other weapons in Ryūkyūan merchant ships, but in very few numbers. It seems that the official envoys mostly carried weapons as a deluxe good, often decorated with gold, silver, lacquer, and shell inlay, or for exhibition purposes; and hence this has been assumed as the limits of the Ryūkyūan trading of weapons. Recent studies, however, have shown that the commercial magnitude of private

commerce has been largely underestimated (Pearson 2013: 202).<sup>25</sup> Ryūkyūans traded large quantities of weapons between Japan and China, where the Japanese swords met great demand.<sup>26</sup> Also we know, for example, that in 1452 the Board of Justice of the Ming Empire issued an edict “forbidding the practice by residents of the Fujian coast of conveying military hardware to Ryūkyūans in private trade deals. The inhabitants of coastal areas of Fujian often stockpiled these weapons to repel *wakō* pirate attacks.” (Smits 2010: 8).

Chinese records often mention the existence, next to Naha port, of the *O-mono gusuku* or “precinct of the royal treasures”, a fortified depot “built at the side of the river. In its inner rooms are kept large pieces of porcelain; the wine cellar is filled to overflowing with jugs of wine; and the magazine is stuffed with iron armor, javelins, swords, bows, and arrows.” (Akamine 2016: 42).<sup>27</sup> The official title could be easily misinterpreted, suggesting a museum-like facility. Nonetheless it was a place for selling wares, also known as *oya mise* or “great market”, that drew the attention of Chinese, Japanese, and Southeast Asian traders to Naha port. Therefore, it seems that there was a large stock of armament in the Ryūkyūs for trading purposes. We must bear in mind that a marketplace is also a knowledge place; to sell merchandises like weapons requires the concurrence of connoisseurs, both from the side of the seller and the taker, to evaluate the quality of materials to agree on a price. Additionally, the usability of the object must be considered, and from here we must infer a more than likely exhibition and display of the weapons performance to attract the buyers and close deals. From the existence of a prosperous armament market in Naha, the circulation of fighting methods and martial expertise can also be inferred.

In this context, during the 16<sup>th</sup> century the arrivals of armed merchants at Naha port constituted a constant source of trouble, and the Kingdom struggled to exert its power in its harboring zones. In 1554 the Ryūkyūans “decided to construct Yarazamori Gusuku

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<sup>25</sup> “Although it should be noted that Ming trade regulations prohibited the export of arms or coinage from China, private trade in weapons may have been more important than previously recognized. Hand-held cast iron bazooka-like fire cannons, produced in China in the Yongle period (AD 1403 to 1424), were displayed by the Ryūkyū envoy to Kyoto in 1466.” (Pearson, 2013: 202).

<sup>26</sup> “Ryūkyūans often made adaptations to foreign weapons. For example, many sword blades came from Japan, but the handles were of Ryūkyūan design to facilitate wielding them with one hand” (Smits 2010: 11).

<sup>27</sup> Akamine is transcribing here the 1462 chronicle of a shipwrecked Korean.

and establish a system for defending Naha as a countermeasure against pirates, and around 1570 they took measures to guard islands and harbors throughout Ryūkyū because of the deterioration of law and order on the high seas.” (Uezato 2008: 70). These defenses were accompanied by supplementary enforcement measures for the visits of official Chinese envoys, to whom the Japanese *wako* and sea lords were eager to trade. They managed a Japanese Trading House (*Nihonkan*) “where between several hundred and almost one thousand armed Japanese gathered and engaged in trade. At the time of the investiture in 1561 a Japanese slashed at the Chinese envoy with a sword and, the measures to control weapons communicated to the Shimazu by the Naha *nushibe* (administrator) had become completely ineffective” (Uezato 2008: 69). The kingdom’s attempts to check trading licenses according to the rules and supervise the weapons in possession of the foreign merchants proved in too many occasions futile, just as the presumed sanctions and punishments. Some pirate-traders visiting the Ryūkyūs hold such power that even sometimes the king’s safety near harbor zones could not be ensured. In 1536 king Sho Sei (1497-1555) only came to visit the Chinese investiture envoy in Naha once the Japanese *wako* had left Naha (Uezato 2008: 69). The fragility of the Ryūkyū Kingdom to secure trade at the ports and control effectively its frontiers is capital to understand the 1609 overtake, both from the perspective of losing the battle and justifying the Satsuma intervention.

The emergence of the Ryūkyū Kingdom tends to be explained as a result of the preferential treatment by the Chinese Empire, cultural paramount, reasoned in terms of commerce as a way to a distinguished culture, conveniently leaving aside the issue of warfare in the East Asian seas and coasts. This version has widely operated as an obfuscating apparatus, transmitting the image of an elite purely interested in the culture that despised war, a character unparalleled in the region. On the other hand, the Satsuma invasion has been articulated as a decontextualized aggression, somehow a product of the natural prone of the Japanese spirit. The conjunction of these depictions bears manifestly modern echoes. At the core of this pattern of thought lies the idea of an intrinsic peace-loving kingdom.

Once the grounds regarding the origins of the commercial nature as the dominant aspect in Chinese-Ryūkyūan relations, and the place of weapons and warfare for the realization of the Ryūkyū Kingdom have been established, the next section will be

dedicated to discussing karate's two foundational longstanding myths. The first addresses the narrative of the 36 Fujianese families, arrived in 1392, as the original introducers of Chinese martial arts in Okinawa. The second explores the unfolding and consequences of the Satsuma clan invasion of 1609, because for popular karate history this event nourished the notion of unarmed Okinawans inventing a bare-handed martial art to defend themselves from the Japanese samurai abuses.

#### **1.4. Ancient Roots of Chinese Martial Arts in The Ryūkyūs: The Myth of the 36 Min Families**

Karate martial mythologies have been pivoting around two historical events that also function as inaugurating and closing narratives of the Ryūkyū Kingdom political independence. The first, prior to Sho Hashi's unification, is the 1392 arrival and settlement to Kumemura, Naha, of the famous "36 Chinese families" (*binjin-sanjurokusei*) from Fujian. In karate circles, this is commonly appreciated as a legendary moment in which the magnificent martial arts from China, stakeholders of undoubted patina, were introduced to the Ryūkyūs. Allegedly this group of experts in arts, crafts, trade, and diplomacy had the mission of helping the inhabitants on the Ryūkyūs by disseminating the superior knowledge of the Chinese Empire. Among the many arts that those expeditionary members mastered and carried with them were Chinese martial arts. Today the 36 families narrative serve as a referential point in tracing back the genealogies and legitimacy of modern and contemporary karate masters and styles. Hence the symbolic importance of the 36 families for karate is top-tier, and therefore it is worth conducting an in-depth analysis of them.

Mamoru Akamine dedicates a small section on his last book to literally discuss the "Authenticity of the "Grant of Thirty-Six Families from Min" (Akamine 2016: 24-25). The matter is of the utmost importance for Okinawan studies and has been addressed by many scholars, for it seems to mark the beginning and intensity of the Chinese empire's favor towards the Ryūkyūs. The *Chūzan Seikan* (1659) describes the "36 families of people from Min" as a community of translators and traders sent by Ming Emperor as means of a grant to the Ryūkyūs. Posterior chronicles as the *Chūzan Seifu* (1725) and

*Kyūyo* (“Chronicle of Ryūkyū”, 1745-1876) replicate the information provided by the first.

As we have seen the historical documents of the Ryūkyū Kingdom elites tend to incorporate adorning rewritings of events occurring up to three centuries into the past. The 36 families hagiography is not an exception. The fact is that they were Chinese moving to new horizons after the successive bans on sea commerce by the Ming Government. Those migrants were not an imperial donation but peoples coming gradually by their own decision, despite having been authorized as representants: “Contrary to the common assumption that the Ming Emperor sent them to the Ryūkyū Kingdom, after the maritime ban of the Ming-government, they spontaneously came from abroad, settled, and formed their community. However, they were given official ranks in the Ming court at the same time.” (Yasunori 2001: 125). The Ming regulations on maritime commerce, responded to the increasing powers and raids of the *wako*, and limited foreign trade to the realm of tributary missions, leaving only three ports to accept this kind of commerce: Guangzhou for southeast Asian Countries, Quanzhou in Fujian for the Ryūkyūs (later changed to Fuzhou), and Ningbo in Zhejiang for Japan. The city-ports assigned to the Ryūkyūs were zones of effervescent international trade and “a profound reserve of technology, information, and skills needed for such a business enterprise.” (Yasunori 2001:125). The Ming decision was also to forbid Chinese merchants abroad to go back to China. In spite of these directives private trading activities continued, powerful merchant endorsed their social position by acting as intermediaries, and the widespread diaspora of overseas Chinese communities survived until nowadays.

The coming of the 36 families must be properly framed by these circumstances. On the other hand, relying on the exact number 36 acts as a mythical endorsement, with neat martial resonances,<sup>28</sup> without historical evidence. According to Akamine (2017: 24) the number 36 is a common expression in Chinese that alludes: “for example, a great number of challenging tasks, or several different lines of battle”, in this case, naming the “variety of responsibilities this people would have, rather than an exact count of the family names involved in the grant”, and expresses the diversity of tasks rather than a

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<sup>28</sup> It is extremely easy to find martial arts references to the number 36; either in karate katas names (“Sanseru”, 36, “Seipai”, 18) or in audiovisual productions of modern Hong Kong cinema like the acclaimed “36<sup>th</sup> Chamber of Shaolin” (1978).

specific number. Kerr asserts that “this must not be taken as a literal numeration; it was customary to speak of the ‘Thirty-six Families of Fukien’ or of the ‘Hundred Names’ of China in figures of speech which merely meant a widely representative group.” (Kerr 1958: 75).<sup>29</sup> Higaonna agrees: “as Fuchien provincials of China were generally so-called by the Okinawans, the term ‘36 families surnames’ was merely a metaphorical expression and did not mean the actual numbers of families, meaning roughly the inhabitants of the lower reaches of the Min River” (Higaonna 1950: 15). It is interesting to note how the *Chūzan Seifu* refers to the extent of the Ryūkyūs territory as the “the thirty-six islands.” (Smits 2019a: 140).

Remarkable sources like the *Ming shilu* made no mention of the reputed 36 families (Akamine 2016: 25; Wade 2007: 23). On the contrary Chinese accounts demonstrate the presence of Chinese and Chinese descendants acting in the Ryūkyūs as influential actors decades before 1392.<sup>30</sup> Others consider a good probability that “Chinese sojourners had been stopping at or residing in the Ryūkyū islands for perhaps hundreds of years by the early 15th century.” (Wade 2007: 22). Another common assumption that must be properly pointed out is that, contrary to the usual characterization, the Fujianese settlers that had been arriving at the Ryūkyūs were not all elite literati. Big numbers among them, if not the biggest, were ships craftsmen and sailors. In this respect Higaonna hints a good deduction:

those belonging to the Sea Guarding Office under the governor of Fuchien Province were passing to the Ryūkyūs for settling and commerce purposes. A big portion of those seafaring men were ‘called ‘choukung’ (ship’s hands) and were not, it seems, so literate. The low standard of their literacy may be seen from the fact that on the chart they used islands such as Maihua-yu (Plum-flower Island) and Paohu-yu (Precious-pottle Island) indicated by drawings instead letters. (Higaonna 1950: 15).

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<sup>29</sup> In George Kerr's study *Ryūkyū Kingdom and Province Before 1945*, that served as the basis for his influential book he states that in Fujian “is customary to use the phrase ‘The Thirty-six Families’ in the sense of ‘representative of all the local people’” (Kerr 1953: 36).

<sup>30</sup> “In 1411, the Zhong-shan ruler submitted a request to the Ming emperor noting of Cheng Fu who had come with that mission to the Ming court: ‘Fu is a person from Rao-zhou, who served my grandfather Cha-du for over 40 years, and has been extremely and unremittingly loyal. This year he is 81 years old. It is requested that he be ordered to retire and return to his village.’ We see here that the Jiang-xi native Cheng Fu had been operating as an aide to the ruler of Ryūkyū from at least the 1370s.” (Wade 2007: 22).



We must understand that the large complexities of situations and possibilities taking part in maritime commerce at that time. Hence it is correct to clarify that some of those Fujianese were highly educated individuals, with literary capabilities and versed in navigation documents and bureaucracies. The Fujianese maritime merchant's expansion responded not only to the intention of maximizing their profits, but also to open new markets and find capital investors. In other words they also acted as brokers: "They could be diplomatic envoys, artisans, peddlers, fishermen, peasants, pirates, brokers or influential merchants, and the capacity they assumed would depend on the particular commercial situation and political environment operating at the time." (Chin 2013, 70). We know for example that Fujianese merchants sometimes disguised themselves as imperial envoys to replace trading tribute missions (Chin 2013: 55). This behavior illustrates their financial power and capacity to gather resources. Similarly, historical accounts describe incidents featuring self-alleged Ryūkyūans ships engaging in illegal trade, causing armed encounters, and then being arrested by Chinese coastal guards in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>31</sup> Other times merchants were captured by pirates and obliged to work for them. Some merchants also began to act as pirates themselves from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards carrying their activities primarily in the Fujian, Guangdong and Hainan coasts: "Chinese pirates prior to the 12th century were, for the most part, fishermen, sailors, peasants, salt peddlers, artisans, family slaves, escaped criminals and wandering rogues; Chinese maritime merchants did not join the confederation until the late 12<sup>th</sup> century."(Chin, 2013: 56-57).

As I have previously noted the Ming ban on sea commerce was an attempt with as clear effects as limitations. It sought mainly to reserve some trading and diplomatic rights for the Chinese Government and its formal associated kings (Yasunori 2001: 123). But, because the Chinese Empire did not pursue a total state monopoly over the whole

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<sup>31</sup> Smits recalls an episode that took place in 1595 in the Zhejiang Coast, north Fujian region. There a suspicious ship boarded by Japanese like people and without proper documents was apprehended after the passage "had raised its sails, brought up cannons, and the crew brandished swords, shot arrows, and wounded a soldier." They claimed to be a tributary Ryūkyūan mission, which makes no sense since the actual mission was stationed in Fujian. Still, once asked, the official Ryūkyūan envoy in Fujian claimed that the ship in Zhejiang was an additional tribute envoy. This was not a one-time occurrence: "There are several well-documented cases of suspicious ships being apprehended by Chinese forces, often after deadly fighting. Despite significant indications to the contrary, the crews eventually, often after repeated rounds of interrogation, claimed to be Ryūkyūans. Moreover, Ryūkyūan officials in China or in Shuri vigorously claimed such crews as Ryūkyūan after learning of the relevant incident." (Smits 2019a: 2018-220).

intricacies of the East Asian international trade system, the authorities allowed and even fostered private entrepreneurship in this new regulatory frame. This setting along with the changing conditions of maritime trade due to geopolitical movements and technological advancements nurtured the emergence of a private mercantile linked to sea-commerce; a social class that did not exist before the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Those historical factors prompted alliances and reconversions of members of the aforementioned social classes (fishermen, sailors, peasants, artisans, outcasts, merchants...), who thanks to the massive profits of sea commerce private could climb the social structure acquiring distinguished status as well as official sinecures and privileges. According to Reid this commercial elite in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century Ryūkyūs were “foreign or foreign descended Chinese becoming the compradors, mediating between the indigenous court members and the traders, or perhaps directly with agents in China. At the same time, the Ryūkyūan elite also used their positions to engage in trade with Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Southeast Asian ports.” (Wade 2007: 31-32). Henceforth the social space of private sea trading in the times of the 36 families arrival to the Ryūkyūs was not an empty one. Fujianese pirate-merchants were already competing in the process of acquiring and consolidating those economic monopolies and class privileges. Since the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century the Kumemura gentry enjoyed tax-free land, rice-stipends, and other social benefits thanks to the Shuri royal court; but actually, in 1392, the tribute missions from the Ryūkyūs to China were already on the way to their peak:

According to the *Ming shi-lu*, the situation regarding the dispatch of missions from Ryūkyū changed completely after the Ming court set Liang Min to Ryūkyū in 1383. In the twelve years before 1383, Chūzan had sent missions eight times, Sannan twice, and Sanhoku once. In the fifteen years after 1384, the number of missions rose to twenty-three for Chūzan, eleven for Sannan, and nine for Sanhoku. Therefore, 1383 can be considered an epoch-making year. (Okamoto 2008: 38).<sup>32</sup>

This can only mean that the Ryūkyūs lords, decades before the unification of the Kingdom, and before the arrival of the 36 families, were using the services of professional merchants and diplomatic experts that had in Kumemura an operation base (Uezato 2008: 60). This scenario aligns and is supported by the information yielded in the first sections

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<sup>32</sup> According to Okamoto the 1383 emissary Liang Min “granted a silver seal to the king of Chuzan” and brought a message to the three kingdoms from the Chinese Emperor. (Okamoto 2008: 42).

of this chapter. Remember that the Imperial intervention between competing lords in the Ryūkyūs at the verge of the 15<sup>th</sup> century must be understood as a clear re-composition of a preexisting existing commercial network to promote the hegemonic position of the king of Chūzan; all with the aid of Chinese trading elites living or working in the archipelago: “Prior to their violent unification, the three Okinawan states maintained tributary relations with the Ming Chinese court via the Ōsōfu, a quasi-independent office located in Chūzan and staffed by Chinese expatriates.” (Smits 2010: 2). Similarly, the death of the first Ryūkyū Kingdom monarch, Sho Hashi, in 1439, and the subsequent disputes, violent intrigues, and rapid throne successions, seem to have marked a turning point in the decline of the official tributary missions, most probably due to such political power instability (Okamoto 2008: 53). Taking into account the above quotation, that is 1383 as the key year to boost and ongoing situation which peaked precisely with the birth of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, to bear the 36 families (1392) as the initiators of the Ryūkyū Kingdom economic prosperity is, at least, a debatable claim.

Besides, it is worth examining the location where the Fujianese families settled, Kumemura, and its place in Naha’s human geography. The 15<sup>th</sup> century Kumemura is described in the *Joseon Veritable Royal Records* (Uezato 2008: 59; Smits 2019a: 50) as an enclave surrounded by ‘earthenwalls’ (*dojo*) that delimited a closed residential area housing Chinese and Korean peoples in over one hundred residences. Kumemura was also known as *Toei* (‘Chinese settlement’) and served both as permanent and temporary residence for merchants. Those that came to Kume temporarily looking for business opportunities “were smugglers slipping through gaps in the nets spread by the strict ocean travel prohibition policy” (Akamine 2016: 42), whereas those living permanently there were employed by the royalty of the Ryūkyū Kingdom as commercial agents.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless the demarcation of such difference may have not been so clear for the Kumemura merchants ended by filling the patience of the Chinese Empire around the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and thus endangered the tributary relations:

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<sup>33</sup> As its been pointed out Kume sea merchants developed close relations with the government, capitalizing its position to engage both in official and private: “They did not assimilate to the local culture, but rather maintained their native Chinese customs, wearing Chinese robes, sitting in chairs, and living in Chinese-style houses with tiled roofs and walls ornamented in red lacquer. They joined the royal government’s tribute missions, and just as they continued their own trade with Naha as their base, surely they also formed a vivid part of the scenery in port cities throughout Southeast Asia.” (Akamine 2016: 42 43).

The Ming court originally brought Ryūkyū into the tribute system on favorable terms in an attempt to tame piracy and smuggling. Approximately a century later, it had clearly become less tolerant of Ryūkyūan illegal behavior and abuses of the system. One of Shō Shin's challenges, therefore, was to up Ryūkyū's game vis-à-vis China. Ryūkyū's misbehaving envoys typically came from Kumemura. (Smits 2019a: 136).

The closed ward was situated within the limits of Ukishima, a small island just next to Naha port. The areas surrounding the main harbor of the Ryūkyūs conformed, until the second decade of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a primed location to which international peoples from East Asia came to live, often amalgamating and fusing. It seems that, at least in the case of Kumemura, the Chinese and Korean communities kept their borders. The Japanese in Okinawa, however, did not hold any architectonic demarcation, unlike happened in other Asian territories, where they resided in 'Japanese towns' (*Nihonmachi*):

had intermingled and merged with local society to such a degree that it was difficult to pinpoint any specific Japanese settlement. Furthermore, though they used the 'Japanese language' (*wago*) and wore 'Japanese clothes' (*wafuku*), they were not necessarily 'Japanese' in an ethnic sense. Operating within 'pirate-like conditions' in a maritime world, they were hybrid entities referred to as *wajin*. (Uezato 2008: 60).

On the other hand, the famous residents of Kumemura were not the only peoples from Fujian in the Ryūkyūs, as many others had been arriving through migrations and commercial activities expansion of Chinese coastal peoples (Uezato 2008: 59). Thus, it seems difficult to stress a narrow ethnic definition of Kume area, especially once the encampment began to expand and broke its former limits to incorporate wider areas. In the same manner it must be indicated that the Naha port zone has suffered through the ages a radical change in land terms. The drifting islands adjacent to Naha ended attached to the mainland "due to a combination of gradual sand aggradation and sea reclamation" (Song and Ikeda 2008: 57). Therefore, without detracting in any way the capital importance of a Fujianese elite residing in the area, is proper to remember that Kumemura was not created with the pioneer arrival of the famous "36 families", as well as that its development was embedded in the process of Naha port steady colonization by many peoples, in terms both of social background and geographic origin areas.

The 36 families myth is not a byproduct of the karate field itself but derives from the general context of Okinawan culture. Over time it has been set into a cogent account filled with political readings and elitist pride. Undoubtedly such idiosyncrasy emanates an extraordinary appeal, gathering the attention of many individuals and collectives in Okinawa, not to mention karate worldwide. At the preface of the karate historical book commissioned by the Prefecture and published in 2017, sure enough, the famous families make their appearance as a historical fact: “The Chinese influence on Okinawan culture was strengthened by the arrival of the ‘thirty-six families’ from China who settled in *Kuninda* (now Kume) area of Naha in the latter part of the fourteenth century. For centuries they served as scholars, bureaucrats, diplomats and trade officials.” (*Okinawa, the Birthplace* 2017: xiii). It is on the back pages, inside a chronology, where the topic is rightly exposed: “Around this time [1392] the ‘Thirty-six families’ from China are believed to have settled in the *Kuninda* (*Kumemura*) area of Naha. In this context, thirty-six should be viewed as a way of expressing a large, rather than a precise number of people” (*Okinawa, the Birthplace* 2017: 277).

Remember the main idea after those Fujianese families, namely a grant from the Ming Emperor unmatched by any other East and South-East Asian territory, surely remains as an extremely attractive allusion to depict Okinawa in its whole. It reinstitutes the notion of the Ryūkyūs as a beautiful, uncommon land by the inherent nature of its peoples and assets. Similarly, it puts the whole descendants of Kumemura, including those participating in martial arts schools, in a very convenient position. For George Kerr a good part of the customs introduced to the islands by the Chinese immigrants were little by little assimilated into local traditions, albeit some Okinawans maintain today a self-honoring conscience of their Kume-Chinese village origins:

The founding of Kume Village marked a great moment in Okinawan history; thenceforth into modern times the very name Kume-mura carried with it connotations of social prestige on the one hand (based on admiration for Chinese literary traditions and etiquette) and on the other, connotations of alien blood. Association with Kume Village suggested distinction in scholarship and association with matters of foreign trade and diplomacy, just as residence in Shuri suggested association with government and the native Okinawan aristocracy. These distinctions persisted in local social attitudes long after the real differences in accomplishment had disappeared and intermarriage had blurred the racial lines. The traditions were strong at the opening of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and linger today among the older generation. In 1907, for instance, an American visitor took his Chinese interpreter into Kume-mura upon the assurance that he would find there scholarly descendants of the “Thirty-six Families”. He did find old men proudly

claiming Kume-mura Chinese descent, but otherwise they were indistinguishable from other Okinawans in literary accomplishments, physical characteristics, or social life. (Kerr 1958: p76).

Indeed, reconstructing the genealogy of Chinese descendants in Okinawa presents several difficulties. Between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Chinese names “were probably adopted in Okinawa [...] emulating the Chinese names in the Kumemura community and doubtless selected by or with the advice of the scholars in Kumemura. However the records are not clear” (Sakamaki 1964: 15). Additionally, in 1625 the Satsuma clan “in accordance with their administrative policy in Ryūkyū, proscribed the use of surnames that had ‘the flavor of Yamato’”(Sakamaki 1964: 34), and coerced the use of names with the “flavor of a foreign people.” (Sakai 1968: 128). Additionally, in 1689 a family register was enforced in Okinawa by assignment or selection. About the nobility inscription “in most if not nearly all cases this was done retroactively” to long died ancestors (Sakamaki 1964: 16). Thus, the families of the aristocracy and the Kingdom’s officials and bureaucrats, formed by consanguineous clan groups ordered by patrilineal genealogies, were positively registered and became known as *keimochi* (lit. possessing lineage or genealogy). By their part, commoners and plebeians remained outside the family register, for they were not allowed to keep genealogies (Akamine 2016: 89). Hence, they became *mukei* (lit. without lineage) until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when a Japanese law required the name-surname system for all the national subjects. In many cases, the creation and reorganization of the family register in the Ryūkyūs rather than manifest the historical continuity acted to embrace and settle class privilege by pedigree: “The revised genealogy compiled by the royal government in 1690 shows that not only Kumemura residents, but also the elite families of Shuri, Naha, and Tomari, bore Chinese family names (or clan names)” (Akamine 2018: 89). Paradoxically it was the Satsuma policy the main reinforcement of social class distinctions between the members of the aristocratic class (*shi*) and the rest of the Ryūkyūan vassals (*no*) and the strict reverence of this social order: “in the Ryūkyū kingdom, Satsuma aimed to preserve the dignity of the royal family and aristocracy, and the new genealogical bureau emphasized class differences and respect for status.” (Sakai 1968: 128). The northern islands on the contrary suffered a diametrically opposed situation after their conquering by the Japanese clan. There, assimilation was utterly emphasized. Separated from the Ryūkyū Kingdom, the northern

islands were fully incorporated into the Satsuma fief, and the local elites lost greatly their privileges.<sup>34</sup>

Hence, summarizing what has been developed in this section, we have seen that from a scientific point of view the myth of the 36 families cannot be sustained. They were not the first Chinese nor Fujianese settlers in the Ryūkyūs; neither were they all literate peoples, nor the first experts in trade, diplomacy arts and crafts collaborating with the Ryūkyūan *aji* and royalty. Kume Chinese traders were not a gift from the Chinese emperor dedicated to philanthropic means, but to secure the Imperial political and economic interests while engaging in the very generous profits of private maritime commerce. In the Ryūkyūs powerful Fujianese merchants assured monopolistic rights for constructing a new elite class that was emerging from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards in the China Seas. At least in the first years, some of them were involved in illegal commerce and smuggling activities, and certain individuals engaged in dishonorable practices like robbery and murder when taking part in official tribute missions to China. They were not a homogeneous ethnic community living in Kume in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. After the Satsuma overtake successive administrative reforms and changes in clan's names mingled the Kume inhabitants with many elite families coming from other parts of Okinawa. And finally, despite some remarkable names as Sai On (1682–1761), who we'll talk about in the following sections, generally the main interest of the Kumemura elites was to conduct trade and commercial activities, and not so much to focus on scholarly virtue.<sup>35</sup> However,

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<sup>34</sup> “han policy for the northern islands called for the confiscation and burning of genealogical records in 1706. This was a deliberate effort to weaken traditional authority. [...] the local officials petitioned the Oshima *daikan*, or Satsuma representative, for a reversal of policy: ‘Some of us regret that we are degraded to the same level as farmers because we have lost the records of our family lineage which had been transmitted to us from our ancestors,’ they said. They complained they were unable to carry out instructions efficiently because ‘Sometimes we, the higher officials, are slighted, and the distinctions of upper and lower ranks are not respected... Please take pity on us. We humbly ask your favor to treat us [high-ranking] officials differently from the farmers. In regard to head dress, also, please let us maintain our dignity.’” (Sakai 1964: 128).”

<sup>35</sup> “The Ryūkyūans studied the Chinese Classics to communicate and do business with the Chinese rather than pursue academic excellence. Although they could write in Chinese, compose Chinese poems, and communicate well with the Chinese officials and merchants, they did not write their own commentaries on the Chinese Classics. They were satisfied with children’s books and morality books for the commoners and Zhu Xi’s commentaries for the scholars.” (Ng 2017: 36). Zu Xi (1130-1200) commentaries on the Four Books of Confucianism composed the canon of study for the civil service examinations at the Hanlin Imperial Academy to where the Ryūkyūan Scholars sent to China attended. The last book studied in the Hanlin curricula, considered the most complicated, was the I-Ching from the Five Classics: “They read commentaries written by Chinese and Japanese scholars. Japan played an important role in promoting the Yijing in Ryūkyū. In terms of Yijing [I-Ching] scholarship in East Asia, Ryūkyū was far behind as compared to other members of the Sinosphere, such as Japan, Korea, and Viet

it must be said that from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, late imperial times, Chinese merchants were increasingly appealing to culture as a self-honoring device (Lufrano 1997).

Therefore, it can be affirmed that the 36 families story is a useful mythic-mystifying story both for karate and Okinawa, which nevertheless due to the facts cannot be regarded as a purely “invented tradition”. Undoubtedly it conveys and condenses a wider and complex frame of historical events and cultural changes that impacted and defined the Ryūkyūs history. We have no concrete evidence that those 14<sup>th</sup> century Fujianese settlers had specific martial arts knowledge. However, it is reasonable to affirm that directly or indirectly they had contact with martial knowledge due to their connections to Fujian port, an area dominated by military garrisons. If sailing, star-observing, mapping, documental, diplomatic, and commercial skills were an unavoidable requirement to cover the Ryūkyūs-China routes, what should we think about fighting? Likewise, when traveling far away to not ‘so friendly’ waters and countries in South-East Asia to buy very prized exotic and luxury goods. There is no reason to infer that martial arts did not cruise the seas before and after the formation of the Ryūkyū Kingdom, just as many scientific knowledges, philosophies, medicines, arts and crafts, as well as religious beliefs, moved thought navigating routes.

The peoples allegorized by the 36 families legend were agents of crucial cultural change, responsible for developing and contributing to the cultural memory of the Ryūkyūs and inspiring the Okinawans in positive ways up to nowadays. But perhaps it would be of justice to recognize that not only a small select group of individuals participated to build this heritage, but also many anonymous peoples who have remained, yet irremediably, silent to history. As for karate, not only the technical contributions deriving from Chinese martial arts must be worthy of our attention, but their sociocultural background beyond the specific field of martial expertise deserves consideration. This is a matter, on the other hand, that has been barely researched. In order to better understand karate as a complex culture, as well as the origins and meaning of its actual iconographies and symbologies, this non-technical sediment must to be explored. Today the Chinese temples of the Kume community are actively promoted by the Government of the

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Nam. The Yijing as a Confucian text was not popular but influential as an oracle manual [...] This aspect of the Yijing was assimilated into Ryūkyū traditions.” (Ng 2017: 37).



Okinawan Prefecture for being “karate related important historical sites and monuments” (Okinawa Karate Information Center 2017b: n.p.). This recognition, despite the mythological nature of the 36 families, and the lack of concrete evidences until the modern period, is culturally and historically grounded, responding to solid reasons. Furthermore, the issue of karate Chineseness has far-reaching implications that reach up to our days. All the aforementioned circumstances will be discussed in chapters 2 and 3.

In the following section I am going to analyze another turning point, the second historical event that has pinpointed the popular history of karate: the Japanese invasion of 1609. By introducing the issue of the family register I have given a first hint on something that actually may seem, at first sight, contradictory: the legendary endorsement of the 36 Chinese families and Kumemura is cemented and fostered by a Satsuma policy. Recall that the first documented mention to them is written at the *Chūzan Seikan* (1650), once the Kingdom was under the samurai clan administration. This is not a mere anecdote or an exception; it turns out that the Chinese-like images of Okinawa, to a large extent, arise precisely after the Kingdom’s subjugation. And they do mainly not to stand for political and cultural resistance, but to serve for the Japanese and local elites’ benefit.

### **1.5. The Samurai Invasion of 1609: Okinawan Subjugation and Karate**

The second longstanding and most important myth of karate, now increasingly in disuse, sustained that the Okinawan martial art was born among unarmed peasants to fight the abuses of the 1609 Japanese Samurai invaders. The tale, which origins I have not been able to place, held great support in karate popular culture during the 20th century, blossoming after the post-WWII Okinawan martial art global spread. Undeniably it discloses a very compelling story and a powerful image. In the last decades the fallacy of the argument has become more and more evident, but the idea is far persistent, and some practitioners and researchers continue to defend vigorously that karate is expressly an anti-samurai art. In its simplicity the narrative has proved notably elastic, unfolding intricate nuances and adaptations. The overall standpoint, however, still recurs to the postulate of Ryūkyūan pacifism, synthesizing once again the Ryūkyū Kingdom as a weaponless land. Taking into account all these considerations it is worth going over the 1609 invasion and afterwar.

At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Tokugawa Shogunate or *Edo Bakufu*, bore great interest in restoring the severely damaged relations with its neighboring countries, after the attempted invasions of Korea, and the military clashes with China in the East Asian War of 1592-1598, also known as the Imjin War. Japanese trade and tributary missions with China had been in a halt since 1547; in such circumstances the Ryūkyūs were envisioned as the best possible mediator. Hence, the Satsuma Clan of Kyūshū, on behalf of the Shogunate, conquered the Ryūkyūs to secure a continuous flow of maritime commerce, regardless of the direct political relations between China and Japan. This same necessity made that the Ryūkyū Kingdom had to maintain to a great degree its autonomy and cultivate in the best way possible its cultural and diplomatic ties with the Middle Empire. Therefore, it is far more appropriate to conceive the Japanese invasion as a seizure of trading and bureaucratic networks, to extract continuous economic benefits by indirect channels, than a thorough occupation and assimilation of the Ryūkyū Kingdom.

As Okinawan studies advance some of the myths that make up karate popular image become untenable. Accordingly, official sources like the book *Okinawa, the Birthplace of Karate*, commissioned by the Okinawan Prefectural Government, acknowledged the essence of the Satsuma coup:

The Satsuma clan's invasion was more a takeover of the Ryūkyūan entrepot trade, than an expansion of clan territory. The structure of the kingdom was allowed to remain largely intact, as was the Sho dynasty [...] The satsuma went to great lengths to conceal their control of the kingdom from the Chinese who at this time refused to trade Japan, but were happy to do business with the Ryūkyū Kingdom as they had in the past. (*Okinawa, the Birthplace of Karate* 2017: xv)

This section, therefore, is dedicated to delving into the situation that led to the Satsuma conquest, its implications, and how they have been reflexed in karate discourses. The invasion of the Ryūkyūs was a consequence of a series of geopolitical changes driven by Japan, China, and Korea, and fostered also by the increasing presence of western empires and Christian evangelists in the Southeast Asian seas. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Ming Dynasty changed its sea-trading policy and the importance of the Ryūkyūs within its system declined. The Chinese empire, moreover, was experiencing severe problems that will lead to the Manchu conquest and the founding of the Qing Dynasty (1636–1912). As for Japan the Ashikaga shogunate or Muromachi *bakufu* (1336-1573) was in its road to collapse; Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598) unified Japan and launched the two wars

with Korea (1592-1598). Finally, Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616) founded the Tokugawa *bakufu* (1600-1868).

The turbulent transitional period between the old and new *bakufu* fueled the competition between Japanese lords, and the Satsuma convened a plan to totally control the sea passage between Japan and the Ryūkyūs. The project, unavoidably, comprised the Ryūkyū Kingdom's position as an intermediary with China. It must be noted, nonetheless, that the Satsuma political strategy over the Ryūkyūs was not only commercial but also a political and military one, to enlarge the clan influence in Japan: "Shimazu pressure on Ryūkyū, therefore, was not a simple case of aggression, and it was certainly not a case of aggression against an unarmed, pacifist kingdom. Shimazu's goal was to work with Ryūkyū to promote trade with China in the absence of *bakufu* power." (Smits 2019a: 145).

In the course of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the merchant and armed power of the Ryūkyū Kingdom has been in a steady decline, while the Shimazu capacities and authority in Kyūshū multiplying. Besides, the Ryūkyūs had almost lost its commercial ties with Southeast Asian countries after the important conquests of the Portuguese (Malacca 1511) and Spanish (Philippines 1570). The Europeans become hard competitors or allies, depending on the situation, for purchasing goods via the Chinese communities overseas (Hamashita 2011: 124).<sup>36</sup> Silver trade acquired new regional importance nurtured by the apparition of Mexico via Spain as a new producer, as well as the growth of Japanese mining resources. The Ryūkyūs turned over the circulation of Japanese silver and, at the same time, progressively developed a need for the Japanese merchants' financial power to offload the goods imported from China to Naha port. The break of commercial relations between Japan and China had risen a business opportunity, positively embraced, for the

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<sup>36</sup> The Tratado de Tordesillas (1494) between Spain and Portugal, which defined the commercial boundaries of each empire (roughly America -except Brazil- and Asia respectively), prevented Spain to trade directly with Asia despite the importance of Malina port. Thus, the Spaniards bridged the situation by contracting Chinese merchants for conducting the silver-silk exchange. The Ryukuans took part in this very lucrative activity, that had Japan as another of its main actors. This changes in Ryūkyūan commercial activities nonetheless could not compensate the weakening of the Kingdom: "Ryūkyū was cited fifty-nine times in Spanish records over 220 years of trade with Ryūkyū (from 1519 to 1738), including the name and location of Ryūkyū; the locations of exchange and trade; the shapes and forms of the various islands and their living conditions; and Ryūkyū's relations with Spain, Japan, and China. Besides these, the tributary relationship with China and the Satsuma invasion were also mentioned. A number of records document the silver-raw silk trade between Ryūkyū and Luzon. During the sixteenth century, the Spanish recorded on Ryūkyū that every year six to eight Ryūkyūan junks called at Luzon islands and that the Ryūkyū people there were presumed to be Chinese." (Hamashita 2011: 124).

Ryūkyū Kingdom to act as an intermediary between China and Japan. Ergo multiple reasons began to move the balance of Ryūkyūan trade towards Japan. Besides Satsuma, *daimyos* of the Oruchi and Hosokawa families sought to become formal commercial partners of the Ryūkyū Kingdom. Hence, the number of Japanese merchants, pertaining to different regional powers, in Ryūkyūan ports increased. The overall situation endangered Satsuma current and projected position. They were greatly armed, and negotiations could easily lead to bellicosity. Remember for example the episode of the aggression to a Chinese member of official tribute delegation harboring in Naha port, and the difficulties of the Shuri royal government to maintain order in the Okinawan trading pots. Furthermore, the Ryūkyūs was a southern frontier to secure Japan and to control *wako* piracy was of the highest concern for the Shogunate too. What in the previous period had revealed itself as a blessing, the geographical situation of the Ryūkyūs as a belt and transfer station for connecting East Asian and Southeast Asian trade groups, now shifted to a delicate and complex position due to the profound changes on the international politics. The Kingdom performed as a historical center for the relationships between China, Japan, and Korea, amply benefiting from this role; now this duty had become a hampering bond.

On the other hand, we must consider that in the Ryūkyūs domestic politics pro-Ming and pro-Satsuma fronts had been evolving along with the intricacies of the dual system of vassalage. This tension modulated an ever-changing orientation of royal decisions between 1556 and 1640:

After Shō Ei's rule became firmly established in the late 1570s, Shuri pursued policies much more favorable to Satsuma. [...] In contrast, although he cooperated with Satsuma early in his reign, after 1593 Shō Nei became unwaveringly anti-Satsuma. [...] In other words, from Shō Gen through Shō Hō, each reign alternated between pro- and anti-Satsuma stances. (Smits 2019a: 146-147).

Since the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Shogunate progressively pressured the Ryūkyū Kingdom, which had been also trading with Japan by the mechanism of tribute missions. For the Shogunate this meant that the Ryūkyūs were a vassal state, no less than it could be to China, and formed part of the country feudal system:

After Hideyoshi's inauguration as regent (*kanpaku*) to the emperor, he required all *daimyo*, including Ryūkyū, to come to the capital and declare their loyalty. In the Eighth Month of 1588, Shimazu Yoshihisa sent a letter to Ryūkyū's King Shō

Ei, demanding that he send a delegation to congratulate Hideyoshi on his inauguration. His letter implied that not only would a long drawn-out confrontation with Hideyoshi result in being blocked out of all trade with Japan; raising the banner of revolt against him would certainly soon lead to the destruction of Ryūkyū. (Akamine 2016: 59).

Already in 1590, the Shogunate was seriously contemplating the invasion of the Ryūkyūs, but in a manner that endangered Satsuma's pursuits. Kamei Korenori, a *daimyo* in Inaba eagerly searching to acquire new harbors, petitioned and was granted by Hideyoshi with the title "Lord of the Ryūkyū". Korenori prepared a warship with thirty-five hundred men to sail for the Ryūkyūs, but the Satsuma clan politically maneuvered to block the *daimyo* intentions (Kerr 1954: 152; Akamine 2016: 57). Shortly after (1592), in preparation for the Korea invasion, the Ryūkyūs received, via the Kyūshū clan, a reminder of the Kingdom obligation, under Hideyoshi's orders, to contribute the overall provisioning of troops and supplies. The Ryūkyūan king refused the petition and Hideyoshi, who have been unsuccessfully asking for the sending of a tributary mission to congratulate his ascend, saw a clear lack of respect in the Ryūkyūan attitude,<sup>37</sup> and replied with an explicit treat:

I, though from humble stock, being blessed by the gods, have unified Japan with my mighty forces. More than sixty domains are now under my control, so that states near and far vie to send congratulations and tribute. But you Ryūkyū, though situated on tiny islets, counting on your remoteness, have as yet sent no tribute or gift. This letter is to inform you that next spring I will undertake an expedition to Korea. You are commanded to send troops to join us, otherwise your kingdom will be the first to be annihilated. (Jiadong 2013: 121)

Naturally, the instruction prescribed to keep the imminent offensive attempt in secret. The Ryūkyūan dignitaries sent with urgency a letter to China, informing the Shogunate intentions. The Empire responded demanding further intel by the dispatching of Ryūkyūan spies to Japan. Amid the changing war events,<sup>38</sup> and with the military

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<sup>37</sup> The continuous refusal from the Ryūkyūan court from 1590 to 1606 to send a tribute envoy to congratulate and express gratitude to the Shogunate ended by being one of the main justifications for the 1609 overtake.

<sup>38</sup> "In the First Month of 1593, the Ming general Li Rusong came with forty thousand soldiers at the request of Korea's King Seonjo, and the fighting reached a stalemate. In the Fourth Month, a cease-fire was declared, the Japanese troops withdrew to the south, and Japan and Ming China entered into peace negotiations. Hideyoshi listed seven requirements for a peace agreement in the terms he gave the Ming ambassador on the Sixth Month, 28th Day, 1593.4 Of these, two were of greatest importance to Japan: first, that there should be legal trade between Japan and China without the requirement that Japan pay

intervention of the Ming forces in the assistance of Korea, the Ryūkyū Kingdom showed a notable resistance to the Shogunate exigencies, looking to move away from the Japanese sphere of influence:

Behind this shift in the government's policy lay Ming China's military intervention against Hideyoshi's invasion of Korea. King Shō Nei anticipated China's protection as its vassal and, on the Sixth Month, 10th Day of the next year (1594), sent a letter in response to Satsuma's renewed demand for support that claimed the kingdom was too weak to send anything. (Akamine 2016: 61).

Unfortunately for such expectations, the foreseen Ming support in case of a most likely necessity did not occur. Finally, the question of the military collaboration to the Korea campaign and the refusal of the Ryūkyūs to fulfill the Shogunate demands, ended up creating the definitive conditions to prompt the invasion of the Kingdom, at the hand of an astute intervention by the Kyūshū clan: "Satsuma then interceded in behalf of the Ryūkyūs and secured a compromise: instead of men, the islands would provide supplies adequate to maintain 7,500 troops for ten months." (Sakai 1968: 116). This semi-arrangement from the Ryūkyūan government perspective was seen as a failure of the Satsuma clan to mediate with Hideyoshi's strains, as it supposed finally the cession of war provisioning and the de facto placing of the Kingdom under Japan; for the Japanese clan viewpoint, notwithstanding, they supplemented about a half of the materials calculated as Ryūkyūan responsibilities, thus the Kingdom owed them a substantial debt. For Sakai (1968: 116) this dissent persuaded the king of the Ryūkyūs to "sought to strengthen his ties with the Ming by informing the Chinese of the impending Japanese attack on the continent." Successive mismatches regarding ship transits, diplomatic affairs, emissaries' delegations and missions of investiture both to Edo and the Ryūkyūs fed the 1609 invasion.<sup>39</sup>

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tribute; and second, that Korea's southern provinces of Gyeongsang, Jeolla, Chungcheon, and Gyeonggi be ceded to Japan." (Akamine 2016: 60).

<sup>39</sup> "Korean-Japanese diplomatic relations were finally restored with the visit to Japan of a Korean ambassador in the Fifth Month of 1607. Once again, Ieyasu commanded Satsuma to negotiate with Ryūkyū on the matter of sending a formal envoy to express its gratitude. In the Eighth Month, when Ryūkyū showed no signs of sending such an emissary, he ordered Satsuma to prepare troops for an invasion of Ryūkyū and try one more time to negotiate with them on the matter of the formal expression of gratitude [...] On that mission, Satsuma pressed the royal government to either pay its portion of the expenses owed for the invasion of the mainland or hand over Amami Ōshima in payment instead. Shimazu Yoshihiro and Shimazu Tadatsune had both participated in the invasion of Korea, but their troops had starved and sickened due to insufficient provisions from their home base; they harbored an

It is important to properly attend at the reconfiguration of the larger geopolitical structure of the East Asian region to better understand the motives and effects of the Ryūkyū Kingdom subjugation by the Shogunate. The Chinese Empire will assist from the distance to the Ryūkyū Kingdom overtake. Probably a major force to prove the Ryūkyū Kingdom hopes futile were the high costs of the Korean wars in military, economic and human terms, as well as the strong inner problems of the Ming Dynasty, near to its downfall (1644). On the other hand, it must be considered that the aftermath of this large-scale military confrontation, necessitated peace and the restoring of commercial and diplomatic relations to cope with the economic burden of war expenses and destruction.

The Shimazu's justification for its invasion of Ryūkyū may have ostensibly been the kingdom's disloyal refusal to send a formal envoy to express gratitude for Ieyasu's efforts in negotiating the reestablishment of trade relations with Ming China, but its real object was to make up the difference between the deficits it had incurred over the years dealing with the Ryūkyū Kingdom, and the assessed value of the Satsuma *han* as reported to Edo. (Akamine 2016: 62).

The Satsuma taking of the Ryūkyūs was certainly fast. In about three days since the military encounter had reached the Ryūkyūan main island Shuri had fallen, and within ten all the resistance focus within the main island surrendered. The armed conflict did not extend beyond Okinawa island once the occupation was effective.<sup>40</sup> Historical accounts and scholarly research coincide in underlining in the lack of readiness by the Ryūkyūan side.<sup>41</sup> For the Chinese empire yet in 1606 it was obvious how Japan was designing the invasion of the islands, and so is registered by that year's investiture envoy to the Ryūkyūs, who meet with stupor the Ryūkyūan indolence about the matter:

He asked the Council of Three about reports that numerous Japanese ships had been spotted near other Ryūkyū islands. Their reply was that such reports had been common for years. Because Ryūkyū was under the protection of a powerful deity, there was no need to worry. Xià commented that if Ryūkyū were to undertake serious military preparations, including organizing an effective defense, acquiring weapons, and undergoing training, then such a state of preparedness would probably deter an attack. When Xià asked Ryūkyūan officials

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understandable anger toward Ryūkyū for defaulting on its military obligations. The Ryūkyūans, however, did not accept this judgment." (Akamine 2016: 62-63).

<sup>40</sup> "Having gained control of Okinawa, Satsuma did not send troops to Kerama Islands, Kume Island, the Miyako Islands, the Yaeyama Islands, etc. Instead, through the Sanshikan, they ordered defenders in these locations to give up their resistance and surrender to Satsuma." (Jiadong 2013: 125).

<sup>41</sup> See for example Kerr 1958: 158.

about what they relied upon for defense, their answer was ‘remoteness and deities.’ (Smits 2019a: 223).<sup>42</sup>

The constant ignoring of signals and the absence of beforehand measures of the Ryūkyū Kingdom has been thoroughly documented; however, the specifics of the war itself have not deserved the same attention. Smits book (2019) covers in Chapter 14 the episode in great detail. Satsuma troops entered the Ryūkyūs archipelago by the north with over three thousand men sailing one hundred war-junks. Amami-Oshima surrendered quickly and virtually without opposition: “On the contrary, the inhabitants of Amami Oshima were very friendly, even supplying them with provisions.” (Jiadong 2013: 125) at the hands dispatched by the Satsuma forces. In its way to Okinawa the samurai reached Tokunoshima facing fierce resistance but also gathering local adhesions to their army. There the most violent clash was commanded by peoples that “using mainly homemade weapons such as knives attached to the end of poles attacked the invaders vigorously, led by two brothers who were the local officials. The invaders suffered casualties and were briefly pinned down. However, once the Shimazu forces were able to get in position to fire their muskets effectively, the defense quickly collapsed under a withering fire.” (Smits 2019a: 229). Messages arrived fast to Okinawa island, and the royal government sent an envoy north in pursuit of an agreement. Meanwhile the news spread among the population causing alarm and panic. At first instance, when battle reached Naha and Shuri, the Ryūkyūan army, mobilizing 4000 men organized in *hiki* and stationed at their defensive positions and fortresses, succeeded in repealing the attack. Nonetheless the Ryūkyūan troops “equipped only with swords, knives, spears and bows and arrows, were no match for the Satsuma soldiers” (Jiadong 2013: 125), who comprised veterans and fighters hardened in the Sengoku period (1493-1590) and the Korean war campaigns well equipped with muskets.<sup>43</sup> Successive waves won Naha port and Urasoe castle, at the south

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<sup>42</sup> The detailed reflections of the Chinese envoy make to extend the quotation worthwhile: “Xià explained that a thousand Japanese armed with swords came to trade and that Ryūkyū would soon bow before Japan. He stated that Ryūkyū’s way of serving the Chinese court was extremely shallow, and that Ryūkyūan officials were manipulative, wavering, and sly. He complained that he and his assistant envoy lacked the power to coerce Ryūkyū, nor was any law effective for that purpose. The next time envoys crossed over to Ryūkyū, he said, the humiliation of the country would be obvious.” (Smits 2019a: 223).

<sup>43</sup> Some scholars extend the Sengoku period further into the 17th century up to 1615 and the Osaka Castle siege as the real starting point of the *Pax Tokugawa*.



center of the island, leaving Shuri encircled. From that point onwards peace negotiation rapidly started.

King Sho Nei political fragility was manifest. Many high-rank officials had soon abandoned Shuri castle days ago, when news of an unavoidable invasion began to reach Okinawa, seeking refuge in the countryside: “although many of the young officials advocated fighting, Ōzato Aji, Kunigami Aji, Gusukuma Ueekata, Mabuni Ueekata, and several other high-ranking officials immediately fled the castle and hid in the countryside and mountains.” (Smits 2019a: 232). Such behavior was not exclusive result of the fears of war but was grounded in the yet existing political instability and elite blocs division within the Ryūkyūs governance system: “At Shuri the competition between ‘pro-Chinese’ and ‘pro-Japanese’ factions among the king's councilors became of grave importance, for it found expression in political conflict as well as cultural preferences” (Kerr 1958: 156). Long before the war there were bitter disagreements and hostilities between different branches of the royal family, and during the invasion some politicians favored military resistance, other peace negotiations, and others as we have seen simply shirked their responsibilities. During the bloodshed outbreak, obviously, there were war crimes and pillage (Jiadong 2013: 125), despite the written regulations that the Satsuma authorities had issued to the army. The chronicles agree that the Satsuma soldiers beheaded Ryūkyūan military and civilians and set on fire multiple areas of the capital. In the light of the circumstances the Ryūkyūan government strategy was to reduce further damage as much as possible and the surrender came rapidly.

The king himself and its counselor council, *sanshikan*, were among the prisoners of war brought back to the Satsuma domain and remained there for more than two years. The Ryūkyūan leaders, however, received the proper treatment of dignitaries and were amused with feasts and diversions. According to Sakai this was a policy of “punishment and reward” to bind the Ryūkyūan mandarines to comply with their interests without endangering the structure of the Kingdom, hence securing the status of its commercial networks. This also explains why the Satsuma did not bear the intention of occupy neither razor the Ryūkyūan land. As I have referred, for these objectives soldiers were given concrete regulations “to avoid unnecessarily arousing the antagonism of the people. The warnings about disorderly conduct included prohibitions against the desecration of

palaces and shrines and the heedless scattering of (Confucian) classics and other books.” (Sakai 1968: 117).

The negotiations of 1611, therefore, assured the independence of the Kingdom and the place of Ryūkyūan royal houses and gentry. Dispositions for ensuring islander’s rights upon Satsuma representatives mistreats were also included: “As in the feudal system of Tokugawa Japan, Satsuma-Ryūkyū relations were established on a relatively formal contractual basis, rather than on vague expressions of Japan’s cultural or moral superiority. In fact, Satsuma did not claim to have any such superiority.” (Sakai 1968: 118). Satsuma focused on parasite trading privileges and guarantee a proper system of surveillance of foreign matters and military affairs, not in reforming the gross of the domestic social or cultural structure. The location of the *daimyo*’s representant (*zaiban bugyo*) command post at Naha port instead of Shuri, the political capital, makes this evident. However, managing the Ryūkyūs trading network required by necessity to reinforce the military supremacy over the archipelago to control *wako* and European merchants’ activities, disheartening at the same time any thoughts of uprisings. Therefore, the Japanese clan effectively imposed a new weapons ban that came to join the one decreed by Sho Shin in 1525. From now on swords and other armaments will be only permitted to Japanese officials.

It worth start thinking if karate, and a good part of its inherited oral history, have not been subject to distortion of the assumed nature of the Satsuma invasion. The Japanese ban of weapons occurred in the Ryūkyūs, that purportedly conscripted the Ryūkyūan martial arts, from that point on developed largely as a non-armed tradition in a clandestine environment, was not a unique measure, but the extension of a practice enforced by the Shogunate in Japan. The pacification and unification plans of the Shogun relied heavily upon Sword Hunt Ordinances (*Katanagarire*), that had begun in Japan three decades ago (1588), and piracy persecution. In 1995 the book *Okinawa Kobudō Graph* edited by the Okinawan Prefecture still reproduced the idea of karate’s secrecy as a result from the Satsuma invasion: “In 1609 after the samurai from satsuma, in Kyūshū, took over the Ryūkyū Kingdom, karate ‘*kobudō*’ became a secret for 250 years taught only to members of the ruling ‘samurai’ class. This secrecy also explains why there are so few written records and other relics of karate ‘*kobudō*’.” (Okinawa Karate *Kobudō Graph* 1995: 3). In 2017 the new Prefectural publication nuances the definition, passing from secret to

private: “Karate was traditionally taught in private to individual students or small groups, so it is hardly surprising that so little is known about its early history [...] there is no evidence to support the belief that karate training took place in secret due to a government ban” (*Okinawa, the Birthplace of Karate* 2017: xv, xvii). For the question of piracy, successive cessation ordinances of the Shogunate targeted specifically the activities concerning Chinese merchants in Kyūshū, Satsuma territory;<sup>44</sup> consistently this strategy finally extended to the Ryūkyūs. Two centuries ago, for the Ryūkyū Kingdom formation powerful lord’s clashes, piracy and weapons were to be controlled, and a weapons ban was enforced by the king. Again in 1609, the regional context and the marine activities in East Asia were catalysts factors for the destiny of the Kingdom; in a certain manner Ryūkyūan history was repeating itself.

After the occupation, the Satsuma agents expressly destined to the Ryūkyūs were few in number, and the samurai accompanying them even fewer.<sup>45</sup> Then it seems that there was not a large presence of samurai in Ryūkyūan soil, at least as a part of the Satsuma official policies. Once more, rules and officialisms account just for a small part of the whole picture. Sakai based on written sources expose the large set norms from the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century pretended to fix the clan officer’s conduct, from illicit trade to social intercourse with Ryūkyūan peoples. Orders addressed gifts, parties, hunting, the pleasures of women and wine... even cutting trees. However, and not surprisingly:

Over half this document of 1700 complained about breaches of regulations such as illegal business operations, acceptance of bribes, fraternization with the local populace, and establishment of illegal contact with persons on incoming ships. It was alleged that Satsuma personnel had married Ryūkyū women contrary to regulations and had used their relatives to promote private interests. (Sakai 1968: 120-121).

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<sup>44</sup> “Together with the disarmament of the peasantry and Declaration of General Peace, the Piracy Cessation Ordinance banned specifically the arbitrary exercise of armed force by maritime powers that be and thus brought them, their territory and their people under the auspices of the *daimyos* of the Toyotomi Regime. The national integration of Japan’s maritime population was now complete, and the Piracy Cessation Ordinances that would follow would for all intents and purposes be focused on stopping such behavior towards Chinese maritime merchants active in Kyushu.” (Nakajima 2017: 63).

<sup>45</sup> “A memorandum probably drafted in the early eighteenth century by the Satsuma records office for the *bakufu* states: ‘The *zaiban* (resident magistrate) sent from here to the Ryūkyūs is a *metsuke* (inspector). A total of about 100 men are sent over, including four *yoriki* (samurai of lower grade). They serve for three years and then are relieved by others. [...] In addition to the *yoriki*, the *zaiban* was assisted by several *tsukeyakunin* (lit., ‘attached officials’) and *yokome* (investigating police agents), some of whom were located in the other islands. The *yokome* functioned in part like censors in China, reporting on the conduct of all officials, including the magistrate.’ (Sakai 1968: 119-120).

Laws also failed in monopolizing maritime trade under the clan's hands, and smuggling in Naha port continued to be a common practice that had to face, yet, improved forms of vigilance.<sup>46</sup> Given the circumstances, we must bear the more than feasible possibility than samurai, ex-samurai, soldiers, or other peoples participating from the Korean war came to reside temporally or permanently in the Ryūkyūs. The Southern archipelago was still an excellent option to flee and hide,<sup>47</sup> also for members of defeated samurai clans, mirroring what happened with the Taira-Minamoto wars of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. For example, we know that refugees of the Osaka Castle siege (1614-1615), one of the most important battles before the definitive control of the Tokugawa Shogunate over Japan, had took settler in Shuri by 1615. We have even notice of a Dominican evangelist named Tomasu covering up like a *bushi* and leading a safeguard passage of Japanese Cristian's from Manila to the Ryūkyūs via Taiwan. (Uezato 2008: 72)

So more than by chance, there were samurai in the Ryūkyūs, not as organized occupiers but as individuals drawn there by a myriad of junctures. Exceptionally local people also obtained samurai status: "In 1787 notice was given by the *han* government to the Ryūkyū-kan that a certain Niigaki from the islands had been made an *okobito* (low-ranking samurai), and he and his posterity were to be allowed to dress like Japanese. Moreover, his name was to be transferred from the Ryūkyū registry to that of Satsuma." (Sakai 1964: 127). Also, we have notices of Chinese envoys displeasure by discovering some Okinawans occasionally performing *sepukku* (Ker 1958: 211). These locals may have been 'indigenous' Okinawans or descendants of the Satsuma migrants that came in considerable numbers to settle in the Ryūkyūs villages after 1609. They intermarried with

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<sup>46</sup> "The Japanese soon became aware that the Okinawan sailors were evading Satsuma's agents by off-loading some of the trading goods at Kume to be smuggled later into Okinawa. There were reprisals. In 1667 Shuri was forced to execute one envoy for failure to conduct his mission properly, and a system of fire signals was inaugurated in the islands to warn of the passage of ships, thus rendering it difficult for them to make overlong or clandestine stops along the way." (Kerr 1958: 182).

<sup>47</sup> Still in modern times karate oral tradition speaks of renowned Okinawan masters like Kōsaku Matsumora (1829-1898) and Ankō Itosu (1932-1915), among others, approaching to a cave in the Tomari area inhabited by an elusive castaway of unknow origin in order to learn fighting techniques. He is commonly known as Channan and his figure has been largely discussed without reaching any consensus: "some have said that he was a Zen monk, while others believe he was a former Qing dynasty official. And still others suggest that he was a gongfu teacher who had fled China after the Boxer Rebellion in 1900." (McCarthy 1999b: 12). See also Nagamine 2000: 30-33; Bishop 2018: 66. Legend or not, the Channan cave, named also Furuhehin, appears in the list of 'Karate sites and Monuments' elaborated by the Okinawan Prefecture (Okinawa Karate Information Center 2017b: n.p).

local women, often from the local gentry, and benefited from privileges on private land ownership, taxes, and others. (Kerr 1958: 188).

At the beginning of this section I have pointed out the Satsuma plan on the Ryūkyūs can be resumed in two main interrelated policies: a cover strategy destined to conceal any signs of formal authoritative Japanese presence on the islands on one hand, and a Sinification process to emphasize the otherness of the Ryūkyū Kingdom.<sup>48</sup> These guidelines were blended to wax the workability of the recently acquired Ryūkyūan trading networks. To deepen the analysis of the Sinification project, before proceeding to outline its implications at the end of this section, we have to retrace back to the place of the Kumemura elites in the Ryūkyū Kingdom social and cultural structure.

In the same manner that the *Chūzan Seikan* (1650), a historical source created during the Japanese rule of the Ryūkyūs, records the legend of Minamoto no Tametomo, a relative of the ancestral Japanese Imperial House and mythical first ruler of the Ryūkyūs, the book endorses the reputed 36 Kumemura families. Despite this Japanese-Chinese duality may seem contradictory, is indeed very congruent to defend the Satsuma interests. If the Minamoto story serves to frame the Kingdom within Japanese history, the reassurance of the Chinese families lore seeks to reify the unique diplomatic and commercial bonds of the Kingdom with China. In this regard, writing down a eulogy reference to the Kumemura elites at the *Chūzan Seikan* was just part of a bigger plan. In reality in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Kumemura had almost completely lost the glory of past days, as did the role of the Ryūkyū Kingdom in the Chinese tributary system and the East Asian maritime commerce, rapidly declining by the convergence of internal and external factors. Europeans began their control over the Southeast Asian ports and private Chinese merchants engaged again directly in international trade. The competence with Ryūkyūan ships was fierce and most likely with the concurrence of violent

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<sup>48</sup> “Satsuma was determined that there should be no excuse for an embargo on the trade from Naha. The Okinawans were ordered to conceal their true relationship with Japan. Chinese were forbidden to settle in Okinawa, and when Chinese embassies and merchants arrived to withdraw from Shuri and Naha, all Japanese objects which might attract attention were concealed, and the Okinawans were ordered to feign ignorance of the Japanese language. For the Okinawan traders and ambassadors to China a special handbook was prepared which contained a variety of probable questions and a list of answers which were designed to evade the issue and conceal the nature of Ryūkyūan subordination.” (Kerr 1958: 166)

encounters (Smits 2019a: 173). Such circumstances consequently led to the vanishment of Kumemura, the central node of the Ryūkyū Kingdom trading structures:

In his *Shǐ Liúqǐúlù* [J. Shi Ryūkyūroku, Record of the Envoy to Ryūkyū], Xià Zīyáng wrote, ‘The Thirty-Six Families have decayed until only a mere six remain, and [Kumemura] resembles nothing so much as a ghost town.’ An entry in the Kumemura *nikki* [Kumemura Diary] reads, ‘By the end of the great Ming dynasty, Kumemura declined until only about thirty elderly residents and children remained.’ (Akamine 2016: 93)

The peoples still living in Kumemura were unable to properly read and write Chinese, being capable to do it “only Japanese-style Chinese writings with return marks and declensional kana” (Matsuda 1966: 294). The Chinese town was no more a lively town driving international commerce and manifesting positively the cultural bond of the Ryūkyūs to China and its tributary system. Present circumstances required to revitalize and enlarge the Chinese acculturation in the Ryūkyūs particularly among the elites. Hence the Satsuma clan held “an aggressive policy to reinvigorate Kumemura” destined to accommodate again “a special government official enclave”, by “filling in the gaps” left behind in the populational receding (Akamine 2016: 93). Naha, Shuri, and Satsuma households too moved to Kumemura, were officially registered with Chinese names, and granted with a provision of rice stipends and other economic privileges purpose-built for them.<sup>49</sup> The survival of the cultural ties with China was equivalent to the chances of the Shuri royal court, and Ryūkyūan gentry to maintain their social position under the Satsuma rule. The new Kumemura residents carried industriously their duties, that is the implementation, observation, and proper display of the knowledge and manners of Chinese high culture.

In sum, the Satsuma administration brought the imposition of an acute Sinification policy over the Ryūkyūs to manage foreign affairs. Kumemura elite families were the main vector to produce and maintain this cultural practice (Akamine 2016: 93). As Smits states “the modern notion that Ryūkyū was culturally Chinese stems from these early

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<sup>49</sup> Years later, in 1798, an educational reform that supposed the establishment of a National Academy in the Ryūkyūs, and changes in the selection system of the Ryūkyūan scholars sent to China for including peoples of Shuri, brought festering protests and arrestments of Kumemura peoples infuriated for losing their privilege (Matsuda 1966: 298).

modern circumstances” (Smits 2019a: 242), and results from combined processes of Sinification and de-Japanization. At the nascent of the 17<sup>th</sup> century:

it was difficult to distinguish Ryūkyūans from Japanese. Their vessels, clothing, weapons, and other items of material culture were often similar or identical. The interpreters who worked for the Ming authorities, often people of *wakō* background, also experienced actual or claimed difficulty distinguishing Ryūkyūan languages from Japanese languages or dialects. (Smits 2019a: 219)

The de-Japanization project targeted primarily top classes and was in principle not meant to remodel the commoner’s life conditions. However, further ordinances censored the regular Ryūkyūan to use Japanese names, attire, hairstyle, or language, and ship names could not make use of the -maru particle (Smits 2019a: 242). The social structure incorporated new social class distinctions – in early modern Ryūkyūs approximately one-third of the population belonged in some way to the gentry,<sup>50</sup> and reforms of the old feudal administration primarily targeting land divisions governmental offices were made.

This means that the general framework was devoted to altering the cultural image of the Ryūkyūan peoples in order to appear as the less Japanese the more Chinese as possible. The paradox is evident because at the same time this objective coincided with redoubling the effective Japanese hegemony over the islands. This cultural mechanism and paradoxical status have been analyzed by Eiji Oguma in terms of the tension between “inclusion and exclusion” in the first volume of his study *The Boundaries of the Japanese*, dedicated entirely to Okinawa in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century (2014). The roots and first steps

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<sup>50</sup> Very briefly exposed the social hierarchy was divided into the royalty or the Shō family; the privileged classes or *shizoku*; and the commoners or *heimin*. At the top of the *shizoku* were distant parents and cousins of the royal family, followed by *aji*, or old local lords that moved to Shuri, descendants. The next stratus of *shizoku* “bore the titles *uekata* or *oyakata*. These families were founded by men who had earned permanent rank and distinction through meritorious service to the state, or by men who were the younger sons of the hereditary *anji* and royal princes.” Below the nobility the elite class was formed “by a system of titles into three principal grades, each with a junior and a senior rating. These were the *pechin*, *satonushi*, and *chikudun*, descendants of the king’s soldiers and retainers, the soldiers and retainers of the *anji*, and scholars, priests, and commoners who earned the gentry status through meritorious service. Within these three ranks a man might rise or fall according to his ability and deserts.” (Kerr 1958: 189). This gentry classes represented practically one-third of the population. The plebeians were farmers, seamen, and other commoners who otherwise can sometimes be granted with courtesy titles. In the first decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the craft activities of the commoners were limited as an economic policy: “reserving them wherever possible to the townsmen of Shuri, Naha, Tomari, and Kume. Thus the townsmen had something which they could exchange for foodstuffs produced in the countryside, and the farmers and fishermen had reason to carry supplies into the urban center. Concurrently, younger sons of the gentry were encouraged to leave Shuri and settle in other places as artisans, without loss of social status. A mutual-aid fund was established in 1733 to benefit members of the gentry who were in financial difficulty.” (Kerr 1958: 205-206).

on the political design of such forced ambivalence are located one century before, at the time of the Satsuma invasion. It should be mentioned that Satsuma continued to edict prohibitions about the use of the Japanese language and objects in front of foreigners still in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Kerr 1958: 247). In the third chapter I will evaluate how this dual characteristic of home-alien still operates at present-day for the construction of Okinawa as a tourist destination, and I will argue that this split image has made way into karate. Indeed, the design of Okinawan karate as a heritage tourism industry is aided and broadcast this general framework, which is on the other hand, a delicate and trapping issue for the state management of one of the most prominent icons of the Japanese nation worldwide. For now, it is important to restate a point: From 1609 on, whereas the urban elites of the political and economic centers had in China a strong aspirational paragon for refinement and cultivation, the countryside remained closer to the Japonic origins of Ryūkyūan civilization (Nelson 2006: 371-373). As Kerr noted, the dual vassalage to China and Japan during the early modern and modern period of the Ryūkyū Kingdom, partially, instituted segregated cultural criteria:

The pressures and requirements of ‘dual subordination’ affected the character and the standards of the Okinawan people. Basic elements of race, religious practice, and language formed natural ties with Japan, and the mode of living in the Okinawan countryside was closer in pattern to the life of the ordinary Japanese than it was to the life of the continental Chinese. But life at Naha and Shuri continued strongly under the influence of both China and Japan. Young men continued to be sent to be sent to Ch’uang-chou and Peking or training, and Chinese ceremony governed the court. The Chinese classics studied at the Kume village center provided the ideal standards of conduct by which the educated elite in Okinawa sought to be guided in its daily life. (Kerr 1958: 167),

This dictated Chineseness, a very early modern exoticization of Okinawa, will also bring many additional revenues for the Satsuma clan in Japan via tributary-festive parades. The romanticized Chinese-like strangeness of the Ryūkyūs was conspicuously staged in *Edo Nobori*, where the Satsuma *daimyo* was the only lord to exhibit an overseas kingdom under his domain.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, the exacerbation, depiction, and consumption of

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<sup>51</sup> The Sinification of the Ryūkyūs, therefore, was in the same manner heavily influenced by the events taking place in China which came to mean reinforced traditionalist turns in Kume: “With the founding of the Qing dynasty, the aristocrats of Kumemura regarded the change to Manchurian customs with some concern. At first, they changed the style of their clothing from the earlier Ming style to Ryūkyūan-style robes, but with the kingdom’s increasing adoption of Chinese ways, they became the center from which Chinese culture was spread, and even more so than before, residents of Kumemura steeped themselves



the Ryūkyūan foreignness performed a symbolic vicarious function for the Satsuma within the social and political realm of the Shogunate. Through the unique Satsuma contribution, and since the very beginning of the conquest, Japan enjoyed the perks of staging internationally a vassal state in an early domestic tourism context: “the Ryūkyūan king was brought to Edo in 1610, followed by six other Ryūkyūan missions to Edo that century. Just as the Europeans were, Koreans and Ryūkyūans, too, were objects of curiosity, confusion, and wonder. Each embassy was a major popular cultural event, a once-in-a-lifetime tourist attraction for people along the route.” (Toby 2019: 121).<sup>52</sup> The Edo processions were occasions for exhibiting to thousands of Japanese peoples the exciting mysteries of the Ryūkyūans, in which flamboyant swords, lances, and other ceremonial weapons framed the colorful and musicalized palanquins march. Woodblock prints and paintings illustrating the Okinawans were produced and published in large scale to be sold as curiosities for the crowds, with the incitement of the powerful Kyūshū Clan. As we will see in chapter two, such kind of sinified processions took place also in the modern Ryūkyūs as a part of the diplomatic ceremonies held for the arrival of Chinese envoys. In this sense it must be noted how the Ryūkyūan tribute missions to Japan were also “scarcely less fictional than the missions to Peking” (Kerr 1958: 187). This asymmetric ceremonial triumvirate governing the diplomatic dual vassalage of the Ryūkyūs, all Chinese-like parades to China, from China and to Japan, perfectly embodies the Sinification process and the de-Japanization policies that the Ryūkyūs underwent between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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in China’s ancient traditions. Kumemura bore the primary burden of ceremonial relations with China, and had they not, the kingdom could not have sinified to the degree that it did.” (Akamine 2016: 93).

<sup>52</sup> “If Koreans and Okinawans were not quite for Japanese what Todorov has called “radical alterities” – that role was played by Europeans- everything about them, from clothing and hairstyles to language and culinary choices, fell well beyond the range of anything apprehended as a ‘Japanese’ identity. [...] Though the referent of the alien parade might not necessarily even be a Korean embassy or Ryūkyūan embassy, but a mythic Japanese conquest of Korea or the journey of a legendary Japanese hero to the palace of the Dragon King, these encounters with the Other were performed in the style of these diplomatic parades, borrowing their structures and regalia to represent alien, non-‘Japanese’ identities and in the process reaffirming common conceptions about ‘being Japanese’.” (Toby 2019: 148-149). In ancient and medieval Japan, the palace of the Dragon King was thought to be somewhere near the Ryūkyūs, also due to the linguistic similitude between Ryūkyū and Ryūgū-jō (lit. Dragon palace castle). Kara peoples, all non-Japanese East Asian encompassed metonymically by China, -kara, including thus Ryūkyūans, were “familiar” others in comparison with those from unimagined (otherworldly in a religious sense, *Tenjiku*) lands far beyond, only discovered from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards. See Toby (2019: 196).

For the occasion of missions to Edo the Ryūkyūan ships departed from the archipelago with dozens of guards. In mainland Japan high-rank Satsuma samurai and officers received them. Then the embassy proceeded to cross Japan “with a large escort of proud Satsuma troops.” (Sakai 1968: 126). Between 1611 and 1850 eighteen ambassadors accompanied by a large number of officers, scholars, merchants, and craftsmen and escorted by Satsuma members voyaged Japan by land to Edo. The striking ambivalence of Ryūkyūan tributary missions to Japan cannot be overstated. Edo processions were the definitive exam for Okinawans to demonstrate their capacity in cultivating non-Japanese appearances, while at the same time operated as “the most important agency through which the governing elite on Okinawa fell under Japanese influence (Kerr 1958: 168). The long processions to Edo, that lasted almost a year, were vectors of contact with ideas and materials, and quite likely with Japanese martial arts outside the Ryūkyūs. One of the fathers of modern karate, Sōkon “Bushi” Matsumura (1806-1894), professional bodyguard of the Ryūkyūan royalty, and popularly known as the “Miyamoto Musashi of the Ryūkyū kingdom” (McCarthy 2016: 144), allegedly learn Jigen-ryu kenjutsu, a Japanese swordsmanship tradition of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, during the 1832 official mission to Edo (*Okinawa, the Birthplace* 2017: 7).<sup>53</sup> Strict regulations sought to forbade interpersonal contacts between traveling Okinawans and Japanese in Edo Nobori, but like happened in multiple manners in the Ryūkyūs the fallibility of such measures is reasonably assumable.

The very same occurred with the Ryūkyū-kan (house) in Kagoshima, Kyūshū, which acted as an element for the pro-Japanese factions of the Ryūkyūs administration and the samurai clan to compensate the Sinification process. The future successor of the king, members of the nobility, and students were sent to the Ryūkyū-kan for long periods and served also as symbolic hostages to reinforce Satsuma domination. This liaison office

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<sup>53</sup> The matter of Matsumura’s official knowledge of Jigen-ryu has been subject of debate. In this respect, Shōshin Nagamine explained that in 1942 he found a scroll and a certificate in possession of Matsumura’s family in 1942, proving the veracity of the claim: “The *makimono* was so badly rotted that most of its message was unintelligible. However, I still remember one phrase clearly. It read: ‘When holding a sword one should be in the same mood as holding a fishing pole. The *shikishi*, obviously written by a scholarly brush, read: ‘*Matsumura Peichin dono, Omokageo Miruni Nagirono Masurunari, Kimiwa kikokuo nasuto omoeba Ishuin Yashichiro*’ (*To Matsumura Peichin, I am extremely saddened knowing that you will soon depart, [signed] Ishuin Yashichiro*). (Nagamine 200: 18). Unfortunately, as happened with the biggest part of karate material culture, apparently WWII obliterated both the scroll and the certificate. Either way, in my opinion is quite plausible that the karate master had been learning Jigen-ryu in the Ryūkyūs, or in other voyages to Japan, beyond the Edo processions.

became the main functional node for the Japanese government to exert its influence on the administrative stratus of the Ryūkyūs. Although the imposition and constant reissuing of restrictions to avoid the socialization with the Ryūkyūan residing there: “there were repeated complaints in official documents concerning their infringement. These men from the southern islands were objects of more than idle curiosity.” (Sakai 1968: 123).

Accounting all the aforementioned elements, particularly those concerning diplomatic and trading activities between China and Japan, it is easier to comprehend why after 1609 the Ryūkyū Kingdom underwent a broad and profound process of Sinification. The policy key was to maintain an apparent status of autonomy and normality for the Ryūkyūs, concealing at the same time any sign of Japanese presence or cultural affinity. The simulacre performed the function of supporting the survival of the Ryūkyūan ties with China, and the Kingdom as a plausible mediator between the most powerful regional actors, who did not maintain direct relations among them.

The dual Japanese-Chinese horizon of Okinawan culture is derived from pre-modern history, when the movements of peoples, ideas, and knowledges via migration and commercial processes intermingling with the local basis gave birth to the Ryūkyū Kingdom. But after the Kingdom subjugation it became an early modern cultural policy exerted by embryonic modern nation-states structures that affected Okinawa thoroughly. For the interest of business and public diplomacy, this cultural policy re-invented an extremely well-simulated Chineseness for the Ryūkyū Kingdom that had in a reborn Kumemura its core. Its protocolary staging was, in general terms, accepted and endorsed by the governing elites of the three states in play, balancing converging interests and diverging orientations. In this respect Miki Watanabe, a leading scholar in modern and pre-modern Okinawan studies, suggests a thought-provoking and very compelling theory. He devises the Japanese patronage over the Chinese-like camouflage of the Ryūkyū Kingdom as a result of a weak and shared position. In other words, the plan searched to alleviate the pressure of a potential clash both for Japan and the Ryūkyūs with Qing China, a “military behemoth”,<sup>54</sup> successor of Ming China, a regime that was fading away at the time of the invasion:

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<sup>54</sup> Watanabe’s analysis deserves to expand the quotation: “The concealment policy was the product of a sense of impending crisis on the part of both Japan and Ryūkyū brought on by a potential threat posed by Qing China. That is to say, unlike the Ming Dynasty, which was well into decline at the end of the

The Kingdom's concealment policy was a political device for further reducing the risk of incurring the wrath of the Qing Dynasty on account of its allegiance to Japan. The policy created both a virtual and real political boundary between Qing China and Japan, which the Kingdom presupposed, guarded fiercely and utilized to its fullest potential, thus making possible the stabilization of state governance between China and Japan, by providing a means to following rules imposed by both polities and balancing any contradictions arising from them, while at the same time creating an international arrangement among the three entities free of conflict. (Watanabe 2017: 111).<sup>55</sup>

This section has examined how the Satsuma conquest of the Ryūkyū Kingdom is a pivotal turn in Okinawan history that marks also one of the most widely circulated karate narratives. The known facts of this major event and its consequences, however, do not align with the common presumptions for either case. It was not a long-lasting crude war in which samurai continuously spoiled the treasures of an unarmed peace-loving nation; occupying thoroughly the islands and despotically persecuting the commoners. It was neither the starting point of the Kingdom's economic decline, although it was a severe coup to economic self-sovereignty. On the other hand the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries bring the growth of production in sugar cane and cotton, besides new crops like sweet potato, all which met large demand in Japanese markets, and increased the caloric resources of Okinawans as well as their resistance to famines, resulting in a remarkable population increase. In economic obligations Ryūkyūans did not meet different standards in comparison to other Japanese territories and vassals of the Satsuma Clan, responding: “to the feudal system of Tokugawa Japan. The Ryūkyū king was not unlike the *shiryoshu*

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16<sup>th</sup> century, when Japan was strengthening its political hold on Ryūkyū, the Qing Dynasty, which rose up in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century as a military behemoth led by a foreign race of people of unknown character, presented such a serious threat to Japan, that the Tokugawa Shogunate, in an attempt to avoid any friction with Qing China over control of Ryūkyū, allowed the Kingdom to swear allegiance to the Qing Court in the 1650s and ordered Chinese rules to take precedence over any imposed by Japan from that time on. It was this sense of impending crisis and efforts to avoid confrontation that made it possible not only for the Ryūkyū Kingdom to subordinate itself to two polities at once, but also to smoothly balance the latent contradictions that threatened to arise out such a political predicament.” (Watanabe 2017: 111).

<sup>55</sup> By its part Jiandong supports the opposite opinion, the Ryūkyū Kingdom overtake signifies the debility of China: “In the end, the Ming court was unable to offer the kingdom either military or moral support. There were three main reasons for this. First, internally and externally, the Ming dynasty was tottering, beset by endless natural disasters and man-made calamities, 'conflicts among political clique' that corrupted the government and unsettled men's minds, the rise of the Jurchen (Manchu) in the north, etc. Second, from a national security perspective, the Ming dynasty lacked maritime consciousness. It paid more attention to land than to sea defenses, believing that, unlike Korea, the Ryūkyū Islands had no geostrategic importance. Third, in terms of national strength, the Korean wars had depleted the Ming treasury; the Ming court did not have command of the seas and was unable to send a naval force to the distant Ryūkyūs.” (Jiandong 2013: 128).

(private territorial lords), vassals of the Satsuma daimyo who placed at his disposal their own tax resources and personal armies on demand.” (Sakai 1968: 123). 1609 neither supposed the commencement of an all-encompassing process of Japanization of the Ryūkyūs. On the contrary, it largely derived in the imposition of a Sinification and forced alterity that reached well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, thus creating an image that lingered until today. This epoch also marked the blossoming of distinctive Ryūkyūan arts Kerr refers how in 1667 “a proclamation to ‘Entourage Arts and Learning’ was issued” (Kerr 1958: 192). In many cases the process entailed intense cultural contacts with Japan, as in the case of *kumiodori* dances, precisely developed to entertain Chinese envoys in the first years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which are connected to stage and operistic traditions like *noh* and *kabuki*.<sup>56</sup>

In sum, if our perception of Okinawa as non-Japanese stems from policies that began to be forcedly applied in the 17<sup>th</sup> century we need to rethink current understandings of the Ryūkyūs martial arts traditions, including karate, as radically non-Japanese in a cultural sense. After 1609 the military system of the Ryūkyū Kingdom did not disappeared but was reformed, naturally, because the *wako* menace and recurring attacks to Ryūkyūan trading ships continued to be a major concern.<sup>57</sup> Even we have documental evidence of Satsuma and Ryūkyūan soldiers being sent together to attend the arrival of a foreign ship in Yaeyama (Smits 2010: 12). Furthermore, police and law enforcers persisted: “even after 1609, Ryūkyū was a normal country, and this normalcy included, for better or worse, state deployment of coercive force for political and economic ends.” (Smits 2010: 13). Under such circumstances it becomes certainly difficult to picture the evolution of Ryūkyūan fighting methods taking for granted the inexistence of knowledge exchanges with samurai methods.

Correlatively we must reconsider the accustomed and still disclosed notions about the marked Chineseness of Okinawa. Karate's cultural history and current image seems to perfectly allocate the cultural boundaries, this half-estrangement, of the post Satsuma

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<sup>56</sup> “This was the beginning of the Ryūkyūan entertainment art as we know it today. One noteworthy addition to this entertainment art was *kumiodori*, literally ‘combination dances,’ which was a kind of light opera. Through frequent intercourse with Japan, Okinawan people learned the *Noh*, puppet shows, *kabuki*, and other stage shows, and these Japanese arts were to stimulate the birth of characteristically Ryūkyūan *kumiodori*. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, there were many able poets, artists, and other literary figures, and the Ryūkyūan folk culture was in full bloom.” (Matsuda 1966: 294).

<sup>57</sup> For brief descriptions of Ryūkyūan ships battling with *wako* in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> see Smits 2010: 12.

Ryūkyū Kingdom. It may be well that by adhering to the aforementioned mindset we are not truly defending Okinawan culture by placing value on karate, but reinforcing an imperialist discourse that has coercively naturalized some Ryūkyūan particularities while obfuscating others; to conceal the multicultural roots of the Japanese nation and their universal representation.

### **1.6.Conclusion: Paradoxes in the Martial History of the Weaponless Land**

In this first chapter we have seen how Ryūkyūs medieval history must be framed in the context provided by the East Asian seas, a porous membrane that interconnected many cultures, lands and ethnic groups characterized by high mobility; a large macro-region of international political relations, socioeconomic dynamism, knowledge trade, and intercultural encounters that have been defined by some experts, like Angela Schottenhammer (2005; 2008) as the “East Asian Mediterranean”. The analogy focus on the seas as a medium of exchange inside a large geopolitical and economic block that, in this case, had China at its center, but can’t be understood without attending to a complex network that included Korea, Japan, Taiwan and needless to say the Ryūkyūs. For the same reason, it is not possible to properly capture the Ryūkyūs sociohistorical basis and developments, which are intricately conjoined with its martial arts, unless we detach from reduce explicative vectors to state borders. This framework will continue driving this thesis methodology in the second chapter, that shifts its emphasis from historical events to cultural geographies mainly of religious origins; and in the third that addresses the most recent changes that are shaping the contours of Okinawan karate since the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the context of contemporary globalization.

The history of the Ryūkyū Kingdom, and most particularly the period before 1609, has been a topic of scarce interest for western academia and has very few references in non-Asian languages, that George Kerr’s work, published six decades ago, continues to be one of the best and main sources is clearly indicative. As I have noted before, providentially for this thesis in the last four-year period two excellent books on the matter (Akamine 2016; Smits 2019a) have been published. The thorough research cultivated in its pages brings us a largely unknown and overpassed image of the Ryūkyū Kingdom as a territory considerably rooted in warfare among regional lords, together with or against

powerful pirates, fighting for the high profits of sea commerce. Gusuku and other fortifications, up to 150, some of them today part of the UNESCO World Heritage, expose the most obvious and unescapable confirmation of widespread hostilities in Old Ryūkyūs. Subsequently I have analyzed how the foundation, unification, and consolidation on the Ryūkyū Kingdom required intense armed conflicts, with frequent royal successions occurring after factional uprisings. The Kingdom had a military system, and documents acknowledge the participation of Ryūkyūan's or Chinese Ryūkyūans since the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century in the Ming network on pirate activities intel, as well as the Chinese Empire coastal system of defense formed by military stations or *qian hu* (Akamine 2016: 31). Attacks by pirates to Ryūkyūan vessels during the XV century are also recorded in historical registers (Nelson 2006: 378). In the same manner a market for weapons existed in Naha bringing in the attention of merchants and pirates alike. Furthermore pirates conformed a major presence in the many islands of the archipelago that provided places to hide and established strongholds.<sup>58</sup> All the aforementioned circumstances, beginning by the mere existence of completing *aji*, and continuing by the information of historical records, the military garrisons, international trading, prominent piracy, and marketplaces lead to a conclusion: simply put, military and martial expertise existed in the Ryūkyūs, and they did precisely in this context and under these circumstances.

Karate heritage narratives are deflecting from portraying the whole reality of the Ryūkyūs past, including such little praisable truths, aligning with the romanticized views of Okinawan nationalism. The problem is that resorting to those distant times is a mandatory need to root the martial tradition, and a close reading reveals evident gaps and contradictions, as well as the ideological nature of karate image within Okinawa. The center of gravity that upholds and strengthens the whole structure of karate heritagization is the backward envisioning of the Ryūkyū Kingdom as a pacifist land commanded by virtuous upper classes. In concordance, two are the main interwoven semantic fields for karate reification: peace culture and nobility practice. Both notions are underpinned by the two myths that I have explored in this first chapter.

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<sup>58</sup> It is thought that Kume island (do not confuse with Kumemura, the district) about 100 km in front of Naha, was in the early days a pirate base.

Undoubtedly by its historical significance and the resonances that bear until nowadays for the place of Okinawa inside the Japanese nation, the Satsuma invasion is probably the most important one. In a similar way the subdued position of the Kingdom after 1609 arranged the basis for the establishment of the Ryūkyūan pacifism myth:

Ryūkyūan elites became increasingly skilled at managing the kingdom's image. They sought to convey to outsiders the image of a small, peaceful kingdom, where Confucian-style virtue mitigated or even eliminated the need for coercive force to maintain domestic order or to defend against external threats such as pirates. Herein lies the basic origin of the myth of Ryūkyūan pacifism, which retains widespread currency today. (Smits 2010: 3).

The Satsuma conquest for karate intervenes almost invariably by way of an ambiguous but compelling explicative device. I use the epithet 'ambiguous' because the warfare, better said the no-warfare, situation of the Ryūkyū Kingdom before and during the Satsuma conquest has been little researched and largely assumed. Here is where the theory of peace culture finds its mirror, that is conceiving the Ryūkyū Kingdom as an inherently gentle state, radically different from the warring Japan of Shoguns, and karate and *kobudō* as a martial art far from the aggressive katana of Samurai, built upon daily tools of humble peoples. Recall that, for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the origins of karate were explained by pop culture in the idea of a martial art developed in secret by unnamed Okinawans under the ill-treatment of Japanese samurai. At the same time it is proper to mind my main hypothesis that is how karate, despite looking to build and project a coherent image of a long existing tradition traceable to the emergence of the Ryūkyū Kingdom, has made from the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards an intense use of discursive adaptation and resignification.

Therefore, although pointing out the Satsuma invasion as the main cause of Ryūkyūan martial arts emergence has been long discredited, this notion still survives, showing high ductility to evolve into diverse and coadjuvant adaptations, but always respecting the limits of the gravitational center: pacifism. From this perspective the existence of Ryūkyūan martial arts with weapons in the times of the Three Kingdoms (around 14<sup>th</sup> century) has been acknowledged in karate spheres, but shaped by Sho Shin's confiscation of weapons to defend the Kingdom from outside, in no way inside, menaces; thus avoiding largely, by implying exclusively self-defense purposes, any undermining of Ryūkyūan pacifism. Here, Okinawans specialists as Smits clearly identify the



rhetorical incongruency “It is therefore ironic that Shō Shin figures prominently in one strand of the myth of Ryūkyūan pacifism: the story of karate. Because the king confiscated weapons and forbade their use, the basic story line goes, Okinawans became adept at fighting with their empty hands or using farm implements as weapons” (Smits 2010:9). At the same time, this reading of the past clouds the existence of a military system in the Kingdom, and how it was formed mainly by troops mobilized out of peasants.<sup>59</sup> Precisely this veil enables the assembling of a second adaptative narrative: karate was indeed a secret elite praxis.<sup>60</sup> The reconstruction of karate heritage narrative has been gradually obliterating and re-appropriating the participation of plebeians in the cultural history of the Ryūkyūs martial arts.<sup>61</sup>

The development of the art of te accelerated with the subjugation of the Ryūkyūs in 1609 by the Satsuma clan of Japan. The Satsuma clan banned the use of all weapons and the practice of the martial arts by the Ryūkyūans. Despite the enforcement of this ban for over three hundred years, the art of te was not lost. The forbidden art was passed down from father to son among the samurai class in Okinawa. Training went on in secret; devotees practiced in hidden and remote places, meeting between midnight and dawn for fear of informers. Having to study secretly and at great risk did not discourage those of martial and enterprising spirit; rather, it inspired them to greater efforts. (Nagamine 2011: 21).

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<sup>59</sup> Kerr also notices the mobilization of villagers in 1527 due to a *wako* increased treat in Naha port waters (Kerr 1958: 142).

<sup>60</sup> Recently books on karate have been published using title formulas like “Martial arts of Kings and Nobles” or “Okinawan Karate: The exquisite art”.

<sup>61</sup> In the second chapter we will see examples of how some of the most reputed martial artists of the Ryūkyūs in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century were in fact commoners and little merchants descendants. Even in many cases the allegedly gentry masters gained their status not by inheritance but by civil service, hence reaching only the lowest ranks of bureaucratic aristocracies: “the lower classes of *chikusaji pechin* (commoner officials) were responsible for maintaining order and thus developed a system of self defense. It appears then that the practice of the martial arts in Okinawan society never obtained the same level of cultural respectability or political clout in the same manner that the *bushi* has developed among themselves since the emergence of the *bakufu* during the Kamakura Shogunate in 12<sup>th</sup> century Japan.” (Tan 2004: 178). Once again, the debate among karate researchers is open. In this regards I coincide to a good extent with the view of Cristian Faurillon who opt for defining “plural origins” for karate *kobudō*. His article is an excellent piece of research about the social origins of *kobudō*, as grounded as unbiased, recognizing reciprocal transfers and contributions of different social strata, especially after the social structure reforms occurred in the seventeenth century. It deals with matters of noble participation, social mobility, peasant self-protection necessities, piracy, Okinawan ritual dances and its assembly points with martial arts, among other topics: “Au contact peu recherché des paysans, les anciens nobles aiji revenus de simples hommes de la terre prenaient connaissances de certaines techniques martiales à base d'outils et d'objets agricoles. Ils en peaufinaient le coté technique, y incorporaient la technique du Té puis progressivement au cours des siècles suivants, y joignent de nouvelles armes en fer car ce métal est devenu financièrement plus abordable au cours du 18 siècle. Nouvelles armes telles: le sai, le timbé rōchin, le tekkō etc. «armes» inconnues du monde agraire. Cette lente évolution leur permet tout naturellement d'accaparer la majeure partie des armes restantes puis d'en codifier l'emploi et qui donnera la synthèse de “l'art du kobudō” tel que nous le connaissons actuellement.” (Faurillon 2015 ; n.p.).

Nonetheless institutional projects like the Karate Kaikan Museum inaugurated in 2017 in Okinawa are correcting, at least partially, this view. There we can read: “Ryūkyū in the Old Ryūkyū period developed military facilities and systems for its national defense, importing weapons from China and Japan that were used in the many complex battles that were fought.” (Karate Kaikan, plaque at site). Regarding the participation of peasants there is prove that at that time existed semi-specialized corps of village defenders in the Ryūkyū Kingdom. Again, the Karate Kaikan museum states that *bo*, the wooden staff, was used by village self-defense groups to protect the crops from thieves: “Even today, each area preserves its own ‘village staff’, which is used in festivals and other events.” (Karate Kaikan, plaque at site). The *bo* of the villages, or *mura bo*, is frequently undervalued by karate hegemonic stakeholders claiming gentry lineages; seen as a mere diversion, with no fighting properties, participating in festivities and annual rites of agrarian origins.<sup>62</sup> The fact that cultural and historical evolution has incrementally reduced, by the limitation of social violence, the necessity of *mura bo* as actual fight, cannot draw a direct line to infer the inexistence of this same necessity in the old days. As a matter of fact, archeological research has found over one hundred and fifty metalworking units at village centers “unconnected with large *gusuku*” from the ages of the Ryūkyū Kingdom, producing weapons, armor, knives, and agricultural and fishing tools (Smits 2019a: 94). On top of that modern karate masters of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century had to turn to the ‘ritual and festive’ *mura bo* to reconstruct the weaponized fighting traditions of the Ryūkyūs, namely *kobudō*, that had been substantially lost. In chapter two I will extend on these circumstances. The vanishing of Okinawan *kobudō* among elites is another of the challenging paradoxes of Ryūkyūan martial arts discourse.<sup>63</sup>

Continuing with the appellation to karate’s secrecy, it likewise conveys ideological underpinnings and domination devices, having henceforth important

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<sup>62</sup> One of the more hackneyed explanations is that Okinawan peasants were extremely poor all-day workers, so no time was left for them to invest in such things as martial arts. Obviously from the sociological point of view this is an extremely feeble rationale, and a classist presumption suggesting that peasantry and the common working peoples are not capable, by lack of available time beyond the dedicated to the sale of its workforce to eat, to produce, engage and enjoy culture. The assertion is astonishing considering that Okinawa, still nowadays, conserve multiple forms of traditional and popular cultural expressions, many of them from peasant origins, continually performed in village festivals. Those rituals encompass worldviews, sites, arts and crafts, that conform a proud heritage of the Ryūkyūan culture.

<sup>63</sup> See Tan on note 57 about the fair possibility that martial art traditions were actually not highly regarded by Okinawan elite culture.

consequences. First, confidentiality and mystery are pitch elevators to any martial art; second, clandestineness, against the background of Satsuma domination, entails the idea of cultural and political resistance through the peaceful means of karate as an ascetic practice. Furthermore, karate read as an aristocracy custom incorporates a sense of cultural pride and royal splendor that divert from plebeian origins,<sup>64</sup> thereby supposedly counter-imaging impressions of karate as an inferior, a scantily refined Japanese martial art. This degrading vision find its roots in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century discrimination towards Okinawa as a subaltern culture by the ultranationalist pre-war Japanese state.

On the other side, the theory of elite culture and resistance finds large support in the self-honoring reflex of the Ryūkyū Kingdom as the best ally of the Chinese Empire, supreme political and cultural force of the epoch. The personification of such uniqueness are the 36 families, their genealogy of scholarly sages and commerce experts who kept a clear sense of distinct origins and private knowledges. Karate secrets also drawn from the 36 families myth and their importance as initiators for the indigenous fighting forms into the conundrums of Chinese martial arts excellences. I have explored in this first chapter how the 36 families are more a mythical figure than an actual community. Also, I have grounded the impossibility of establishing an uninterrupted Kumemura lineage due to the populational decadence of the district in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and its rejuvenation with families either from other Okinawan locations or Satsuma migrants. In the same manner, it is important to notice how the Ryūkyūan gentry pride by the Kingdom ties with China commonly expands to Shuri district as the place of royal relatives and political power notably accultured in Chinese protocols. On first sight classical Chinese civilization manners of the court may well be seen as related to the Ryūkyū Kingdom golden age prior 1609, thus a further example of political resistance extending to the modernity; but as demonstrated in this chapter sharp Sinification was nothing but precisely Satsuma policy to de-Japanize Okinawa. Karate Chineseness-like seem to derivate and looking to be reinvented by referring to the 36 families, and the cultural potency of Chinese

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<sup>64</sup> By the modern period of Okinawan history about 30% of the population pertained at least nominally to the privileged classes. (Kerr 1958: 189). The monstrous body of elites supposed a burgeoning system of taxes for the commoners which had little esteem for the government: “When Japan’s Meiji state moved definitively to annex Ryūkyū in 1879, some Ryūkyūan elites protested and passively resisted. The annexation, however, engendered no widespread popular opposition, whether in Okinawa or other islands. During the late nineteenth century, there was little popular loyalty to or nostalgia for the kingdom, or what might be better termed the regime in Shuri” (Smits 2019a: 238).

influences via Kumemura. However, one salient paradox is that the flourishing of Chinese culture in the Ryūkyūs happened by Japanese mandate. As Robert Sakai most aptly affirms: “It is somewhat ironic that Chinese studies in Ryūkyū became truly active after Satsuma’s invasion of the kingdom” (Sakai 1990: 7).

Regarding the issue of karate as an upper-class exclusive one more relevant dimension must be call into question. There exists a dispute between rival gentries and karate traditions by their geographical limits, being broadly Naha-Kumemura (representative of Chinese trends) and Shuri-the Royal Castle (of Ryūkyūan ones) complementary and antagonistic at once.<sup>65</sup> By means of the contradictions and disagreements in karate heritagization discourses inside Okinawa, a field of aggregated interests, accommodating different preferences and orientations on multiple layers, is revealed. Henceforth the struggle to load karate ideological terms is not restricted to the dispute between Japanese karate and Okinawan karate, but within Okinawan stakeholders themselves. In order to configure a proper analysis frame for karate we must bear in mind a complex structure that can’t be reduced neither to political boundaries, class hierarchies or cultural geographies, but rather as a tangled interplay of these arenas on superimposing regional and national levels. Chapter 3, besides attending such factors will introduce the supra-national scenarios, like the Tokyo Olympic Games karate debut or the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage candidature, that shape the contends on karate as an iconic signifier for nation and peace.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> The following statement, rightly pointed out by George Kerr, is equally valid for locating karate legitimacies and inseparable from the re-imagination of karate as a gentry culture mainly of Shuri areas: “The preëminence of Shuri families and the privileges and advantages conferred automatically through residence at the king's capital, created a tradition of prestige which has persisted into the 20th century, for wherever Okinawans assemble for the first time, in Ryūkyū, in Japan, or in overseas communities, it is quickly but tactfully established if a man has been born in Shuri, educated in Shuri, or has married a woman of Shuri, in that order of precedence.” (Kerr 1958: 187)

<sup>66</sup> “The modern and contemporary manifestations of the [pacifist] myth now include a substantial number of residents of Okinawa among its proponents. The details of the Ryūkyūan past are sufficiently remote that Ryūkyū’s history can be molded to serve contemporary agendas with relative ease. Obviously, interpreting the past is always a contentious issue, and many aspects of Okinawa and Ryūkyūan history remain the subject of scholarly debate and disagreement. That said, however, the effacing of all forms of coercive activity on the part of Ryūkyūans throughout history goes beyond the usual boundaries of academic debate. It is a remarkable propaganda accomplishment, one first seriously attempted by eighteenth-century Ryūkyūan officials. (Smits 2010: 16).

Finally, is of the utmost importance to reinstate how both China and Japan approached to the Ryūkyūs in response to economic and diplomatic interests.<sup>67</sup> The Kingdom draw on commercial opportunities in exchange of diplomatic duties that involved two potencies in conflict requiring a bridging third. Many opportunities and dangers raised in this scheme, but it is proper to acknowledge that there was little room for the Ryūkyū Kingdom to accept or despise this arrangement, because in comparison it was a military dwarf.<sup>68</sup> Directly connected to our contemporaneity, and with the third chapter study that is the institutionalization of a karate tourism industry, this first chapter brings up a remarkably analogy and an enlightening paradox. Okinawa, by its natural sparse resources and its geographical environment is still extremely dependent of overseas commerce in economic terms. Likewise, the geopolitical tensions between giant potencies, Japan, EEUU and China, that had in Okinawa its center, induce several pressures, and narrow the archipelago range of action. As happened during the early Ryūkyū Kingdom and after Satsuma's overtake with the dual vassalage system, the Ryūkyūs resources remain within a structure of dependence delimited by powerful economic and military nations. In the midst of such determinants, economical development passing through international networks controlled by the Japanese state, as well as exotization, tourism, and pacifism continue to modulate both Okinawa and karate representational status and prospects. In this respect, the early modern and the contemporary political agendas reveal eye-opening parallels.

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<sup>67</sup> Long before the Japanese conquest, in the first decades of the 15<sup>th</sup> century China had relied in the Ryūkyūs to be a proper intermediary with Japan: "In 1432 (Xuande 7), the emperor dispatched his envoy Chái Shān [J. Saizan] to Japan to invite the Muromachi *bakufu* to send a tribute legation, ordering Ryūkyū to act as a mediator in the negotiations. Thus, the Ryūkyūans bore responsibilities as diplomatic liaisons to Japan, in addition to acting as "decoys" for the pirates, collecting and conveying information on their movements, and guarding against them." (Akamine 2016: 31).

<sup>68</sup> In terms of political international relations, the Kingdom had to grow a hyperdiplomacy habitus, an extreme control over words and actions to avoid any misinterpretation by the two surveilling empires. These constraints forced what George Kerr catalogued as "the weapons of the weak", meaning "courtesy and accommodation, hesitancy, delay, and passive resistance [...] the arts of compromise and evasion were essential to survival." (Kerr 1958: 167). Other scholars, nonetheless, argue that by these same principles the Kingdom was able to considerably implement its own agenda and "carve" an autonomous space between China and Japan (Hellyer 2009: 36-38).

## **Capítulo 2. Geografías culturales del karate de Okinawa: Simbología, religión y cultura marcial**

Como hemos podido comprobar en el primer capítulo, durante la época premoderna las franjas marítimas del del Asia oriental configuraban una zona transnacional en el sentido más amplio de la palabra. Un territorio inundado por una plétora de señores del mar, enviados diplomáticos, comerciantes, piratas, contrabandistas y migrantes de múltiples culturas y naciones (incluidos los europeos), que a menudo compartían barcos y puertos. El comercio por mar actuaba como transmisor de un flujo permanente de conocimientos científicos, incluidas técnicas de guerra y de combate, y creencias religiosas. Así, territorios marítimos y costeros eran zonas altamente dialécticas y con características específicas en comparación con las interiores. Tanto el contacto con el mar como los modos de vida que de él se desprenden configuran un espacio particular, una zona fluida y privilegiada para el encuentro intercultural entre distintas regiones y grupos humanos. Además, las propiedades de los desplazamientos por las aguas del este de Asia, marcados por los peligros naturales y la amenaza de la piratería, confieren a los aspectos espirituales una importancia capital. En este contexto, diversos cultos religiosos cruzaron fronteras geográficas y llegaron a Okinawa, interactuando con su cultura marcial.

Este segundo capítulo, por lo tanto, se enfoca en las geografías culturales del karate, en la confluencia de religión, simbología y cultura marcial, a partir de tres territorios y sus respectivas tradiciones. Primero atiende a la cultura indígena de las Ryūkyūs, donde los poderes chamánicos y guerreros de las figuras femeninas determinan de manera crucial la creación del Reino de las Ryūkyūs. Posteriormente se analiza la llegada, desde Japón, de Hachiman y sus cultos. El emblema del dios japonés de la guerra terminaría por convertirse en bandera oficial del Reino durante prácticamente cuatro siglos, y conformando uno de los símbolos más asociados y difundidos por el karate de Okinawa. Finalmente, el capítulo vira hacia China, concretamente en dirección a la región de Fujian, la cual mantuvo durante varios siglos un estrecho contacto con las Ryūkyūs gracias al comercio marítimo. Como resultado de dicha trabazón, deidades y creencias taoístas, originarias de la zona, arribaron a las Ryūkyūs. Se presentan así dos casos de estudio: Mazu, diosa de los viajes navales y centro ritual de las relaciones oficiales entre el Imperio Chino y el Reino de las Ryūkyūs; y Marshal Tian, dios del teatro y las

marionetas, conocido hoy en las esferas del karate de Okinawa como «santo patrón» de la disciplina.

## **2.1. Desde Okinawa: chamanismo, marcialidad y religiones indígenas en Ryūkyū**

Abordar el pasado religioso de Ryūkyū es una empresa considerablemente difícil. Como sucede con otras zonas del Asia oriental y suroriental, la presencia circundante y los continuos intercambios culturales con Japón, China y Corea –y sus respectivas tradiciones populares, así como los intrincados sistemas de variaciones del budismo, el taoísmo y el sintoísmo; proporcionan una gran diversidad de creencias, prácticas y tradiciones en la historia de Okinawa, a las que se deben sumar el sustrato indígena. La dispersa geografía del archipiélago, con diferentes grupos de islas y regiones, agranda y enriquece el mosaico religioso y de intensidades de los contactos de Okinawa con otras geografías del Asia Oriental. Todo ello introduce una enorme variabilidad y sincretismo en las prácticas, las aproximaciones y las nomenclaturas haciendo aún más complejo el estudio del fenómeno religioso en Ryūkyū. A ello se le deben sumar una serie de preocupaciones metodológicas que son comunes al estudio de religiones minoritarias y de tipo popular, por oposición a las tres grandes religiones del Asia Oriental anteriormente citadas (Kreiner 1968: i). A este respecto, cabe recordar la atención que en el ámbito de los estudios japoneses han suscitado las investigaciones sobre las religiones y el folclore popular, representando probablemente una excepción en la región. Así, desde principios del siglo XX los estudios en torno a los sistemas de creencias y los rituales en las Ryūkyū han venido concentrando buena parte del total de la literatura académica disponible sobre Okinawa, con especial énfasis en el lugar de la figura femenina (Bolinger 1969; Lebra 1966; Rokkum 2006; Rots 2019; Sasaki 1984; Sered 1999). Con estos antecedentes es preciso aclarar que un análisis pormenorizado de las interacciones históricas de la religión y las artes marciales en Ryūkyū –tema de amplísimo calado– está fuera del alcance de esta sección. La intención se limita, por tanto, a señalar el continuum de la conjunción entre la cultura religiosa y la cultura marcial en Ryūkyū, y como ello se ha reflejado en el karate, de manera que permita proporcionar las huellas históricas y trazas culturales necesarias de su existencia.

El lingüista y folclorista Iha Fuyū (1876-1947), nacido en Naha en el seno de una familia perteneciente a la aristocracia y educado en Kioto y la Universidad Imperial de

Tokio, es ampliamente reconocido como el padre de los estudios okinawenses. Firme defensor de los okinawenses, de sus orígenes étnicos y lingüísticos comunes a los de los japoneses, y por tanto de Okinawa como una suerte de reservorio de cultura japonesa, Fuyū, en general, veía la incorporación a Japón como una oportunidad para mejorar las condiciones de vida en las islas y acabar con la discriminación social y política.<sup>69</sup>

Fuyū tuvo en las artes marciales de las Ryūkyū uno de sus intereses. El pionero de los estudios okinawenses estaba convencido igualmente de que el karate no era una práctica privativa de las élites, sino que estaba extendido entre campesinos y mercaderes. Reputados practicantes e investigadores de karate coetáneos de Fuyū como Taira Shinken (1897-1970), del cual hablaremos más adelante, coincidían con dicha teoría. El estudio de las religiones en el Reino de Ryūkyū fue una de las más destacadas tareas de Iha Fuyū, frecuentemente en relación con asuntos de índole militar. Así uno de sus artículos tuvo por título «Un estudio sobre el poder de las armas y la magia en la historia de las Ryūkyū». <sup>70</sup> La fuente principal de Fuyū para estas investigaciones fue la escritura de origen indígena más antigua de las islas, un conjunto de textos compilados en veintidós volúmenes y conocidos como *Omorō Sōshi* (1531-1623).

El *Omorō Sōshi* («Antología de Poemas y Sentimientos») es un escrito fundacional de la cultura de Okinawa formado por antiguos versos y cantos compuestos por sacerdotisas (*noro*), poetas y plebeyos anónimos. Fruto de la tradición oral y compilado entre 1531 y 1623, este texto reúne materiales que se remontan al siglo XII abarcando mitologías, cuestiones de la vida cotidiana y costumbres, convirtiéndose así en un testimonio excepcional de la historia temprana del Reino de Ryūkyū. Para Akamine, el *Omorō Sōshi* es «the Shuri royal government's anthology of Okinawan religious songs» (Akamine 2016: 23); para Smits es «the most important source for reconstructing the relationship between religious thought and practice and political power in Old-Ryūkyū» (Smits 2000: 92); Nelson destaca el aspecto místico: «*Omorō* are magical poems meant to be sung at ceremonies or on special occasions and are supposed to generate or direct the supernatural energy that Ryūkyūans call by a variety of terms, most commonly *seji*» (Nelson 2006: 374); y para Iha los *omorō* eran «magic spells» (Nakajima

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<sup>69</sup> Al respecto de los esfuerzos de Fuyū por armonizar positivamente la identidades okinawenses y japonesas es muy recomendable la lectura de Ishida (2018).

<sup>70</sup> Referencia en Tomoyose (1962).



2006: 28).<sup>71</sup> Como cualquier lector podría confirmar, y estrechamente relacionado con las declaraciones anteriores, el *Omoro Sōshi* es también una conspicua colección de cantos de guerra. El siguiente poema narra una marcha militar de Shō Hashi (1371-1439), primer Rey del Reino de Ryūkyū:

The well-known chief priestess  
Put on a scarlet armor,  
[And] with a sword on her side,  
[went to war]  
Her fame resounded in the country.  
The illustrious king has made  
Tsukishiro his guide  
The priestess his leader.<sup>72</sup>

La conocida sacerdotisa principal  
Se puso una armadura escarlata,  
[Y] con una espada en su costado,  
[fue a la guerra]  
Su fama resonó por todo el país.  
El ilustre rey ha hecho  
de Tsukishiro su guía  
de la sacerdotisa su líder.<sup>73</sup>

En sus anotaciones a este poema (*omoro*) Sakihara (1987) explica que, en el texto original, la palabra Okinawense *sedakako*, traducida aquí como «El ilustre rey», significa literalmente una persona con «alto poder espiritual»; mientras que la palabra para sacerdotisa (*monoroshi*) significa literalmente «alguien que sabe cosas, un chamán o sacerdotisa». Tradicionalmente, en Ryūkyū las sacerdotisas actuaban como líderes espirituales y protectoras de las elites gobernantes y las comunidades de los pueblos pequeños. La importancia y el predominio de su papel en los asuntos de la nación y la gobernanza se basa en el sistema indígena de creencias donde la magia y el chamanismo,

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<sup>71</sup> “Fuyu Iha, the so called father of Okinawan studies, explains Omoro soshi: ‘Omoro, which is the abbreviation of omoriuta meaning chants for the sacred groves, is the oldest form of the literature, which initially, like Japanese haiku, was easily composed by anyone but gradually monopolized by priestesses and narrowed its definition from poetry to religious verse. For rituals and ceremonies, the priestesses composed omoro as magic spells. It starts from creation myth to hymns for kings, verse of heroes, wars, sailing, poets, landscapes, the celestial and a few love poems. (218-19). Recent study by Shuzcn Hokama clarifies the etymology of omoro. It stems from the verb omou, meaning originally ‘narrate’ but is replaced with ‘contemplate’ in modem use. Omoro is the narration of a deity, more like oracular reading or psychic channeling than praying.’” (Nakajima 2006: 28).

<sup>72</sup> Traducción obtenida de Sakihara (1987: 150).

<sup>73</sup> La traducción al español es mía.

medios de acceso a un conocimiento secreto que concede un poder espiritual supremo, son tan poderosos como las habilidades y la fuerza militar.<sup>74</sup>

De este modo, el *Omoro Sōshi*, uno de los textos más importantes para poder analizar y comprender las cosmovisiones del Reino de Ryūkyū, se dedica considerablemente a dicha unión entre el poder militar de los señores feudales y del poder espiritual de las sacerdotisas. El hecho de que tal asociación constituya un *topoi* de los *omoro*, revela el significado ritual de las armas y la guerra dentro de la cosmología popular. En el pasado de Ryūkyū, tanto la magia y la religión, como el poder militar y político, formaban una unidad diferenciada pero sistemática: «The secular and religious where equally important in Okinawan culture, and the two coexisted harmoniously and supported each other.» (Sakihara 1987: 110). Gracias a los *omoro* sabemos, por ejemplo, que tras unos decenios de fuertes disputas internas, Shō En (1470-1476), el iniciador de la segunda dinastía Shō que duraría hasta la desaparición del reino en 1868, consiguió el poder político nuevamente por la intermediación de la hechicería: «[Shō En] acceded to the throne by the words of a magician [...]. To gain the administrative power meant that the fortune-tellers or the occult powers had great power and meddle into the administrative affairs» (Tomoyose 1962: 62-63). Los cambios de índole política eran anunciados y difundidos públicamente por todo el reino gracias al concurso de las *yuta*, o adivinas-poetas, quienes se encargaban de componer solemnemente las canciones que trasmitían el mensaje divino de los cambios de poder político, así como otros asuntos del estado.

La noción de las sacerdotisas como guerreras, y de la general predominancia espiritual de la mujer como protectora chamánica y especialista ritual de las comunidades y el ámbito familiar, es un rasgo típico de Ryūkyū. Uno que, por cierto, devino en tema principal de los estudios del folclore Okinawense previos a la Segunda Guerra Mundial a partir del trabajo, como ya he mencionado, de Iha Fuyū; en especial de su monografía *Onari-gami-no shima* («Las islas de la diosa-hermana») de 1938 (Beillevaire 1999: 182)

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<sup>74</sup> Otros *Omoro* que relatan la connivencia de guerra y religión en la formación de las Ryūkyūs pueden encontrarse en la compilación de Sakihara, quien llevó a cabo la primera traducción disponible en inglés, como por ejemplo los que tituló: “El ataque de Shō Hashi”, “El Señor Aurikomo en la guerra”, “Armadura y Hombro” o “Castigo de Yaeyama”. En este último, compuesto en el año 1500 con motivo de la misión militar que el rey Shō Shin envió a las Islas Yaeyama del sur para superar la rebelión de la clase dirigente nativa, el éxito del “Ruler of the lords” está asegurado por el “granted spiritual power”. (Sakihara 1987: 66-68).

que alcanza nuestros días (Sered 1999; Allen 2002; Wacker 2003; Rokkum 2006; Chibana 2013). Como he apuntado y puede verse en el anteriormente citado *omoro*, en la formación del Reino de Ryūkyū el dominio político se adquirió mediante la guerra entre señores feudales (*aji*), cuyo poder en el campo de batalla era también resultado de la protección mágica de los poderes divinos de sus sacerdotisas chamánicas. Este esquema de autoridad que combina el poder político-militar masculino y el poder político-religioso femenino, es una herencia del régimen de organización social que dio lugar al período Gusuku entre los siglos XI al XV, y que parece reproducir el sistema familiar de parentesco de Okinawa, donde la hermana es la protectora espiritual, u *onarigami*, del hermano. Una *onarigami*, en la cultura tradicional de Ryūkyū, es aquella mujer del grupo familiar o clan dotada de poderes chamánicos y encargada de proteger a los hombres de amenazas de origen terrenal o sobrenatural.

De esta forma, en las relaciones de parentesco la hermana se reconoce como una figura cercana a la divinidad o «hermana-kami» (Haring 1961; Mabuchi 1964). Este esquema dio lugar a la creación de una jerarquía de sacerdotisas dentro de la estructura religioso-administrativa del Reino de Ryūkyū cuyo rango alcanzaba varios estratos: desde el castillo de Shuri en donde la hermana del rey (o en su defecto la reina) se situaba en el tope del escalafón actuando en calidad de espíritu protector de la nación, siendo reconocida como *kikoe ogimi*; hasta la articulación de la vida social en villas y pueblos, donde la sacerdotisa asignada se encargaba de la gestión de los asuntos religiosos y la protección frente a los espíritus malignos y los infortunios. Así las funciones de liderazgo de las *onarigami*, normalmente a cargo de las *noro* o sacerdotisas oficiales,<sup>75</sup> incluyen, entre otras, los ritos funerarios y aquellos dedicados a los ancestros, las plegarias relativas a la salud de los miembros del clan, la protección mágica para expediciones pesqueras y marítimas, así como para asuntos agrícolas (es decir, las relativas al crecimiento y recolección de cosechas, incluyendo la expulsión de plagas y pestilencias). Esta preeminencia de la figura femenina en la vida social y espiritual de las comunidades es vista como una característica que diferencia netamente la cultura de Ryūkyū con aquellas

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<sup>75</sup> Las *noro* eran cargos oficiales asignadas a unidades administrativas formadas por una o varias aldeas. Se encargaban de conducir los rituales recogidos por la religión estatal, y como tal eran una extensión del poder de la corte, posiblemente interviniendo en otras tareas como la recogida de impuestos (Smits 2000: 97).

de China y Japón, donde el confucianismo y el budismo arrinconan la presencia de las mujeres es tales cuestiones.

La dependencia del hermano respecto al poder espiritual de la hermana, que tenía su máxima expresión en los ritos de la realeza por los cuales el rey recibía del sol su poder y potestad divina para gobernar por intermediación de la *kikoe ogimi*, ha sido una constante temática de los estudios okinawenses y su peculiaridad (Goto 2016; Smits 2000). De manera muy sucinta, la ideología político-religiosa del Reino de Ryūkyū fijada por Shō Shin se sustentaba sobre la concepción del rey como *tedako* o «hijo del sol», y de la *kikoe ogimi* como vehiculadora de dicha energía.<sup>76</sup> Este orden de pensamiento presenta, según Smits, claras influencias japonesas de la mismísima Amaterasu y de la figura central del budismo Shingon, Dainichi Nyorai, así como del ideario chino donde el gobernante es hijo del cielo (*tian*):

Tedako thought was a mixture of Chinese, Japanese and native Ryūkyūan elements, but the most important two components of it were native Ryūkyūan traditions of solar worship and Shingon Buddhism from Japan, whose central deity is Vairocana the Solar Buddha. (Smits 2001: 168).

De hecho, el budismo japonés que había alcanzado Ryūkyū y que actuó como uno de los componentes de centralización y sacralización de la autoridad de Shō Shin, proporcionó un marco adecuado para desarrollar la religión estatal en Ryūkyū proporcionando «a powerful layer of religious protection to augment the power of priestesses» (Smits 2019a: 141). De esta forma, las sacerdotisas coadyuvaban en el sistema de la religión estatal como un elemento de pacificación.

Asimismo, y con base en investigaciones recientes, Smits actualiza sus investigaciones pasadas (Smits 2000, 2001) en su último libro al analizar cuestiones en torno a la ideología *tedako*, las *kikoe ogimi* y la división social y funcional respecto a la espiritualidad implícita en la tradición de las *onarigami*. En primer lugar, parece ser que

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<sup>76</sup> “The second phase occurred in the seventeenth century, during which time the central role of priestesses as empowering agents came under attack. Shō Shōken’s separation of the king from direct participation in many religious rites set the stage for the steady displacement of *tedako* ideology in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the third phase. During the kingdom’s final two centuries, Ryūkyū’s elites initiated large-scale institutional reforms designed to enhance royal authority and prestige and to portray the king as a Confucian sage, following Chinese models. Some elements of *tedako* ideology, however, remained evident in royal rites and symbolism even during the late nineteenth century. Furthermore, Ryūkyū’s female religious officials, although by then clearly subordinate to the male sovereign, continued to serve the state as religious technicians.” (Smits 2000: 122).

el arquetipo *teda* en Ryūkyū tiene su origen en lo que Smits denomina «capa cultural del norte», y que comprende territorios que van desde el sur de la península de Corea y la isla de Tsukushima, hasta la parte más meridional del archipiélago de Ryūkyū, las islas Tokara, cerca de las costas de Kyūshū.<sup>77</sup> En segundo lugar, respecto a la consideración de la hermana como ente protector y espiritual del hermano, que se enraíza y condensa en la visión tradicional de las *onarigami*, parece ser que nos encontramos ante un fenómeno que surge en los primeros compases de la época moderna y que «Should not be read backward in time either to the *Omorō* or to Shō Shin’s religious hierarchy, as has been common practice» (Smits 2019a: 195). Es decir, que las nuevas investigaciones históricas sobre el pasado remoto y en el período del Reino de Ryūkyū sí confirman la importancia capital de las mujeres como guías espirituales, más no la existencia de una oposición diametral y privativa entre las capacidades espirituales de hombres y mujeres: «The *Omorō* frequently refers to kings and local lords as some kind of ‘teda,’ and powerful priestesses and female shamans appear in its songs. Spiritually powerful male rulers also appear in the songs.» (Smits 2019a: 195).

No es fácil sobredimensionar la importancia de la magia y la religión para la cultura de las Ryūkyū y aún más importante su permanencia histórica. Por ejemplo, durante el asedio al castillo de Shuri en la invasión de 1609, varios soldados de las fuerzas pertenecientes al reino lanzaban chanzas y burlas contra los guerreros de Satsuma. De acuerdo con Smits, ello entronca con una costumbre anterior: «Ryūkyūan warfare sometimes featured ‘cursing battles’ prior to actual battles, in which priestesses chanted abusive *omoro* at the opposing side. The king ordered that this unhelpful verbal skirmishing end, but it did not.» (Smits 2019a: 232). Con todo algunas puntualizaciones acerca del *Omorō Sōshi* deben ser hechas. Dado que nos encontramos ante una compilación que recoge hechos pasados, la situación política del momento termina por definir la configuración del texto y su tono histórico-mitológico, tal y como pueda pasar con el propio *Chūzan Seikan* o el *Kojiki* («Registro de hechos antiguos») japonés de 712. Ello quiere decir que, con frecuencia, el *Omorō Sōshi* reescribe el pasado de acuerdo con

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<sup>77</sup> “the ability to substitute ‘Heaven’ for ‘sun’ probably reflects the idea of the heavenly realm of Obotsu-Kagura, which we have traced northward to the Korean Peninsula and beyond.” (Smits 2019a: 195)

su contexto de su re-compilación a principios del siglo XVIII, forzada por un fuego que destruyó, en gran medida, el castillo de Shuri.

Por otra parte, cabe destacar que se ha tendido a considerar a los aspectos religiosos de los *omoro* como intrínsecamente indígenas, situándolos pues fuera de la órbita del budismo; y ello a pesar de la tremenda importancia del budismo como religión estatal desde los inicios del Reino de Ryūkyū. El debate, no obstante, sigue abierto. Diversos investigadores consideran que, así como algunas de las cosmovisiones y rituales de Ryūkyū muestran una notable influencia china, en buena medida lo que se han considerado como expresiones indígenas, bien podrían entenderse en tanto que desarrollos locales de las tempranas interrelaciones entre el budismo Shingon y formas ancestrales oriundas:

Japanese Kumano gongen worship became widespread by the time of Shō Shin. It regarded the Ryūkyūan deities as Buddhist avatars and introduced Shingon rites into native religious practices. A good example is *amagoi* rites in which the high priestess would pray for rain [...] Clearly Shingon Buddhism was a major part of the ideological foundation of the early kingdom, and there is ample evidence that Kumano *gongen* worship came into the Ryūkyū islands from Japan even before the establishment of a centralized kingdom. By the time of the *Omoros* reconstruction in the eighteenth century, however, and probably much earlier, specific Shingon-derived «native» Ryūkyūan religious practices such as *amagoi* rites had come to be seen as so naturally and obviously Ryūkyūan that their Buddhist origins had been forgotten. (Smits 2000: 94-95).

Estos análisis acerca del lugar del esoterismo en los aferes guerreros de las Ryūkyū y de su posible relación con el budismo Shingon son importantes para realizar, al menos, dos acotaciones respecto a los propósitos de esta tesis. Primero, la idea del entroncamiento cultural se refuerza. Pues va más allá de la leyenda de Minamoto no Tametomo que vincula la cultura guerrera japonesa y la Okinawense, un tema que afrontaremos en sucesivos apartados cuando toque el turno de analizar la figura de Hachiman. Por el momento baste aludir brevemente cómo sucede este entroncamiento cultural. En tanto en cuanto los *omoro* pueden considerarse obras de ficción histórica y muy significativamente, aunque de forma parcial, como ficción marcial; cabe señalar que el uso de amuletos y hechizos es precisamente una de las características de estos géneros en Japón, tanto en el medievo temprano, como en el tardío. Por ejemplo, en obras como *Kagekiyo* (finales del siglo XV o principios del XVI) que sitúan su acción cerca de las Guerras Genpei (1180-1185) y la derrota del clan Taira (causa de la legendaria llegada de

Minamoto no Tametomo a Ryūkyū, como se recordará), la brujería, hechicería y los mudras son de máxima importancia en la narrativa.<sup>78</sup> Además, y como más adelante veremos, este mismo marco permite entender la interacción y relevancia de algunas deidades taoístas originarias del área de Fujian para la cultura del karate.

La segunda acotación importante respecto a los propósitos de esta tesis se refiere a cómo esta conexión entre magia, esoterismo y artes marciales en la historia y la cultura de Ryūkyū permite comprender por qué, tanto la biografía de algunos maestros okinawenses como el conjunto de la esfera del karate, muestran síntomas de la pervivencia de esta interrelación místico-marcial más allá del siglo XIX. Nuevamente cabe destacar que tales expresiones aparecen en la cultura del karate con sus especificidades, pero sin duda como subconjunto de la de Okinawa, cuya cultura vernácula está también profundamente marcada por la religión como magia, y no tanto como doctrina o especulación metafísica:

The pillars of the magico-religious aspects in folk society in the Okinawan region are the *kaminchu* (godlike people) such as the *nuru*, who functions as female deity (*noro*), the *nigang* (root god), and *sasu tsukasa* (god servant), and others who practice as shamans, such as the *yuta* (mainly on Okinawa Island), the *kamkaryana* (spirit-possessed person, Miyako Island), the *nigebi* (prayer-person, mainly the Yaeyama Archipelago), and the *kampito* (godlike person, mainly Yaeyama Island). Of these, the former for the most part celebrate the religious ceremonies that take place at sacred sites such as *utaki* and *gushiku* or at sacred places worshipped from a distance, such as *ugwanju* or *haishu*, and they nearly always play the chief roles in the public festivals of hamlets and villages and the supplication ceremonies of communities. In contrast, the latter participate in the private sphere of magical belief among the people, in such things as judgments about the fortunes of individual houses or families within those communities, or the avoidance of misfortune, or prayers for the cure of illness, and so on. (Kokan 1990: 112-113)

Con anterioridad he referido cómo el budismo japonés, con una importante red de templos Shingon y Rinzai Zen, formaba el grueso de la religión estatal, de manera que sus monjes participaban de los asuntos del reino como diplomáticos y consejeros políticos.

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<sup>78</sup> Al respecto puede consultarse por ejemplo Kimbrough 2019: “Thanks to his mastery of a powerful esoteric formula -the so-called mist mudra (kiri no hō, or kiri no in)- Kagekiyo escapes from the city without being pursued. If the practice of martial arts is a ‘way,’ or *michi* –a path to Buddhist enlightenment, like the medieval, quasi-religious pursuits of the tea ceremony, traditional dance, calligraphy, and flower arranging, as many have suggested that it is- then we might say that such physical fighting techniques as the ‘jabbing, mowing, and spreading maneuvers’ represent an exoteric aspect of that ‘way,’ while the mist mudra and other combat spells represent an esoteric aspect. (Kimbrough 2019: 213).

Templos y monjes budistas, ya fueran okinawenses o japoneses de origen, servían para los más diversos asuntos escolares y culturales como, por ejemplo, la escritura del *Omoro Sōshi* o el aprendizaje de artes y oficios entre los siglos XIV y XVII (Kerr 1958: 219). Ello no impidió, sobre todo a partir de Shō Shin, que el confucianismo y las expresiones de la cultura religiosa popular china de origen taoísta fueran introducidos entre las élites, formando parte también de la colección de las prácticas de la aristocracia y los ritos diplomáticos de Ryūkyū. El común de los Okinawenses, empero, parece ser que se mantenía tan tolerante como, generalmente, indiferente al cuerpo doctrinal de las tres grandes religiones del Este de Asia. (Kerr 1958: 156).

Esta preferencia que las clases populares tenían por los rituales religiosos sin excesivas constricciones dogmáticas permitió el desarrollo de una cultura religiosa ampliamente sincrética y adaptativa, marcada por la reciprocidad y la polivalencia de unas deidades en tanto que avatares o encarnaciones de otras. Así, en Ryūkyū existía una cierta analogía escasamente problemática, dado el enraizamiento de las creencias entorno a las *onarigami*, entre los cultos a Mazu, Kannon y Benzaiten, diosas todas ellas relacionadas con la seguridad de los viajes marítimos debido a su poder para controlar el agua y los fenómenos meteorológicos. La polivalencia y analogías entre estas deidades femeninas nos remiten al concepto religioso japonés *honji-suijaku* («base original - huella manifiesta»). La idea que subyace a esta noción es de un sincretismo o pensamiento combinatorio entre los cultos locales de los *kami* y las figuras del panteón budista, que están habilitadas para aparecer en múltiple fenomenología, manifestándose como avatares que sean capaces de apelar al conocimiento y a la imagen local:

incarnations or embodiments of the immaterial noumenon or Buddhist truth. [...] The ‘ground’ represented the Buddha in its immaterial form of ultimate truth, while the ‘trace’ aspect was represented by the ways in which ultimate truth made its phenomenal appearance, the Buddha’s ‘means’ meant to lead suffering sentient beings to ultimate salvation. (Swanson, Chilson 2006: 24).

Puesto que las travesías por el mar o la residencia en zonas costeras implicaban una gran probabilidad de encuentros armados, Mazu, Kannon y Benzaiten son también diosas guerreras, siendo frecuente encontrar representaciones en las que aparecen portando armas para defender a sus devotos. Más adelante, y atendiendo a este contexto marítimo, dedicaremos una sección a Mazu y Kannon en relación con las artes marciales de Okinawa. Por el momento, dedicaremos nuestra atención a Uni Ufugusuku, sin duda



el más notable guerrero del folclore Okinawense, cuyas aventuras se sitúan en las primeras etapas del Reino de Ryūkyū y cuyo escudo familiar es hoy imagen de uno de los estilos de karate mundialmente más extendidos, el *Shitō-ryū*.

### **2.1.1. El héroe marcial folk: Uni Ufugusuku**

Ōshiro Kenyu (mto. c. 1469) –también conocido como Oni-Ufugusuku u Oni-Ogosuku, es el más célebre guerrero del folclore oral y literario de Ryūkyū, siendo su figura evocada con cierta asiduidad en tanto que creador legendario del *ti* o arte marcial indígena okinawense. Ufugusuku resulta ser un lejano ancestro de relevantes maestros de karate de los siglos XX y XXI, como por ejemplo Mabuni Kenwa (1889-1952). Nacido en Shuri, Mabuni es el fundador del estilo *Shitō-ryū* (1934), con centro en la ciudad de Osaka y uno de los más practicados en todo el mundo. El maestro okinawense migró a la isla principal de Japón en 1929, para convertirse en una de las figuras capitales en la popularización del karate en el país nipón. A pesar de haber aprendido y practicado karate en Okinawa durante 40 años, el *Shitō-ryū* de Mabuni, a la inversa de lo que sucede con el *Gōjū-ryū* de Miyagi Chōjun (1888-1953) o el *Uechi-ryū* de Uechi Kanbun (1877-1948), compatriotas y coetáneos; no está considerado en Okinawa como uno de los estilos tradicionales, sino como un karate japonés.



*Figure 3 - El escudo oficial del karate Shitō-ryū, fundado por Mabuni Kenwa.*



*Figure 4 - Mabuni Kenwa (1889-1952) posando en una foto de Juventud junto al escudo familiar. Fuente: Web de Shitō-ryū Catalunya*

El escudo del estilo *Shitō-ryū* es, de hecho, el escudo de Ufugusuku y, entre otros linajes, de la familia Mabuni.<sup>79</sup> La lectura que hoy día se hace de la simbología del blasón se encaja dentro de la categorización retrospectiva del karate como un arte de paz, conformando básicamente iteraciones del siguiente ejemplo:

This emblem has been the family crest for many centuries. The circle can be interpreted as symbolizing peace and harmony (Wa), while the two inner vertical lines and two horizontal lines represent the Japanese calligraphy for the word 'person' or 'people'. The emblem therefore symbolizes 'people working in peace and harmony'. Because Kenwa Mabuni sensei was greatly influenced by his two main teachers in the development of his Karate, he also included the interpretation of the interior lines to represent his two main teachers – Itosu Ankō and

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<sup>79</sup> Las genealogías del escudo de la familia Mabuni pueden consultarse en la página archivada "Okinawa Family Emblem" del Okinawa Information Bureau. Allí mismo es posible comprobar el gran número de familias Okinawenses representadas por variaciones de la insignia de Hachiman (Okinawa Family Emblem 2004: n.p.).

Higashionna Kanryō. The crest became synonymous with Kenwa Mabuni's Karate-do style (Shitō-ryū) and helped to identify it clearly. (The Mabuni Family Emblem 2000: n.p.).

Según las escrituras familiares, Mabuni pertenecía a la decimosexta generación de descendientes de Ōshiro Kenyu (Golinski 2010: 16; Hokama 2005: 39). Ōshiro Kenyu es el protagonista de un conocido romance literario que remonta su acción a mediados del siglo XV, un momento histórico de disputas entre las sucesiones al trono en Ryūkyū y fuente del canon clásico de las canciones y dramas Okinawenses. Según este relato, Oni-Ufugusuku estaba destinado a ser *aji* del distrito de Goeku al norte de la isla principal de Okinawa, pero por el momento fungía como general militar al servicio del *aji* de Amawari de Katsuren, esposo de Momoto-Fumiagari, hija del monarca Shō Taikyū (1454–1460). El drama se desencadena cuando Awamari denuncia una supuesta conspiración del *aji* Gosamaru destinada a perpetrar un golpe de estado. Gosamaru es atacado en armas por el rey Shō Taikyū y acaba suicidándose. La acusación de Amawari, que resulta ser falsa y parte de una conspiración para derrocar al rey, profundiza en la desestabilización del reino. Oni-Ufugusuku, héroe al servicio de Awamari pero leal al rey, descubre el complot y, junto con Momoto-Fumiagari, huye al castillo de Shuri para informar a la corte de los pérfidos planes de su señor. Una vez allí, y bajo comando de la casa real, el guerrero y virtuoso de la espada reúne fuerzas militares para lanzar una campaña contra el traidor *aji* de Katsuren. Gracias a su vigor y sus habilidades bélicas, Oni-Ufugusuku salva la vida del soberano de Ryūkyū. Como agradecimiento por haber derrotado a Awamari y en reconocimiento a su rectitud e integridad, Oni-Ufugusuku es premiado con el *gusuku* (castillo-fortaleza) de Chibana y con el amor de Momoto-Fumiagari, que acaba en feliz matrimonio. No obstante, con el ascenso del siguiente monarca, Shō En (1415-1476), fundador de la segunda y definitiva dinastía de Ryūkyū, el héroe caerá en desgracia encontrado la muerte. La tragedia de Ufugusuku está recogida en un *kumiodori* de título Oni-Ōgusuku: Ufugusuku Kuzuri («La Caída de Ōgusuku») creado en 1756.



Figure 5 - Uni-Ufugusuku y su amada Momoto-Fumiagari en un mural gigante de 180 metros que narra la historia de Okinawa. Koza City. Fuente: el autor, 2018

El affaire Amawari/Gosamaru, por su parte, está recogido en las crónicas *Chūzan-seifu* (1701) y *Kyūyō* (1743–1745), dos de las principales historias oficiales de Ryūkyū, protagonizando a su vez uno de los *kumiodori* más célebres. Las lecturas políticas sobre la realidad de los hechos, no obstante, son controvertidas y seguramente responden, de nuevo, a los equilibrios de poder en el momento de formalizar la historia oficial. Durante el siglo XV, el Reino de Ryūkyū se encontraba en una fase de lucha enconada entre familias aristocráticas con relaciones de consanguinidad; así pues, muy probablemente la creación de una narrativa que loa a Gosamaru y Oni-Ufugusuku sea obra de los descendientes de éstos (Yonaha, 2019: 223).<sup>80</sup> Más allá de ello, lo importante es retomar el hilo sobre el guerrero folk okinawense y sus poderes espirituales. El prefijo *oni-*,

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<sup>80</sup> El capítulo de libro de Yohana realiza un análisis muy completo de este y otros *kumiodori*. Además, refiere la existencia de una *kumiodori* dedicado Oni-Ōgusuku: Ufugusuku Kuzuri (La Caída de Ōgusuku, 1756), que trata de la defenestración y muerte del héroe con la llegada al poder del siguiente soberano de las Ryūkyūs, Kanamaru. Desafortunadamente por el momento no he podido encontrar más información.

comúnmente traducido como «demonio» u «ogro», denota a alguien con una capacidad o talento extraordinario muy frecuentemente de tipo mágico. Tal es el caso del apodo que recibiría Oni-Ufugusuku entre los círculos de karate, donde se suele hacer referencia a su gran tamaño (por encima del metro ochenta) y su extrema habilidad con la espada (*kenjutsu*) y el palo de madera (*bōjutsu*). La ciudad de Okinawa designó la tumba de Oni-Ufugusuku como propiedad cultural en 1980 y una placa lo recuerda en el lugar como «of large build and superior in martial arts».

Es preciso mencionar que los talentos «extraordinarios» de Ufugusuku no se reducían solo a aspectos de constitución física y entrenamiento técnico en artes militares, sino que incluían también el uso de fórmulas nigrománticas: «Oni-Ōgusuku had been singing divine songs, which miraculously conjured up a fierce storm that interfered with Amawari's advance.» (Smits 2019a: 116). Así, el legendario guerrero de Ryūkyū comparte capacidades mágicas con su amada Momoto-Fumiagari, sacerdotisa de sangre real que aparece en el *Omoro Sōshi* como una poderosa danzante chamánica.

Oni-Ufugusuku participa de un ideal de autoridad militar y majestuosa, divina o cuasi-divina, con la habilidad de controlar los elementos naturales del agua y el viento, aspecto vital para entender el origen cultural del binomio entre poder militar y poder religioso de Ryūkyū (Smits 2019a: 116). Rastrear la procedencia de tales rudimentos nos llevará a nuestro siguiente apartado: la trascendencia de Hachiman para entender la civilización de Ryūkyū y el porqué de la omnipresencia de su estandarte en la iconografía el karate, especialmente en el kobudō de Okinawa.

Por el momento, es preciso recordar el primer capítulo dado que ahí he expuesto que la historia medieval de Ryūkyū estuvo marcada por una violenta y sangrienta disputa entre los señores feudales (*aji*) para el control de territorios y redes marítimas comerciales de la isla principal de Okinawa. La narración de esos hechos en las historias oficiales, compiladas a posteriori y sin eliminar completamente los detalles de batallas y hechos sangrientos, se tornó fundamentalmente en expresión poética de la virtud gobernantes de las casas reales y aristocráticas. Cabe reincidir, no obstante, en que la creación y mantenimiento del entramado de los poderes locales y regionales hasta llegar a la unificación efectiva del Reino de Ryūkyū, estuvo determinada principalmente por la potencia militar. La autoridad política, además, era una extensión de esta última. Coincido con la opinión de Smits (no solo porque está ampliamente documentada, sino porque es

absolutamente congruente con la situación geopolítica en el Este de Asia<sup>81</sup>) cuando apunta que, en principio, sería perfectamente posible aplicar el término *wakō* a personajes históricos como los primeros reyes de Ryūkyū o el mismo Oni- Ufugusuku:

Early Ryūkyūan rulers – a term encompassing the various kings, *aji*, and local strongmen- were either *wakō* leaders themselves or were closely associated with *wakō* bands. Given their prevalence in the East China Sea network, it would have been remarkable had a location such as the Ryūkyū islands not been the abode of *wakō*. (Smits 2019a: 250).

Como ya he señalado, en territorios de Kyūshū y Ryūkyū durante la Edad Media temprana, la supremacía sobre las áreas terrestres se mantenía tremendamente disputada, mientras que las fronteras con los espacios marítimos –tan notablemente redituables y fluidas– se encontraban escasamente controladas. Es por ello que algunos de los *aji* de Ryūkyū, caciques militares que empezaban a emerger con gran fuerza entre los siglos XII a XIV, eran con toda probabilidad *wakō*, debido a que los mares y las islas eran precisamente su dominio:

The impact of Japanese pirates in the 14th century spread far beyond Koryō Korea. They intercepted envoys from Siam and Java, causing Siamese to cease traveling north to seek trade in Japan and Korea. Pirates sold captives from their raids as slaves as far afield as Ryūkyū, where contacts then ransomed them back to Korea for trade privileges. Other pirates emigrated to Ryūkyū, becoming powerful chieftains there. (Shapinsky 2019: 8)

De la misma manera, los procesos de pacificación y centralización del poder en Japón durante los siglos XIV a XVI, significativamente análogos a la creación del Reino de Ryūkyū, se hallan íntimamente relacionados con una creciente unificación de las zonas terrestres, por un lado, y la criminalización de las potestades autónomas de las actividades marinas, por otro; esto con la intención de ser integradas bajo las regulaciones monopolísticas de los nacientes estados.

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<sup>81</sup> Ya he apuntado a lo largo de esta tesis como los *wakō* forzaron políticas mercantiles y territoriales tanto para la china Ming como para el Japón de los Shōgunes, siendo Ryūkyū, cadena de islas que conectan el norte del mar este de la China con el sur, un foco nodal de tales estrategias: “Because their power was based at harbors, these warrior-rulers functioned as *wakō*. It was precisely people like the first Shō dynasty kings that the Ming court was trying to bring into what it regarded as a lawful political order by means of generous tribute-trade terms. The lure of tribute-trade profit, however, was also a powerful incentive for violence within Ryūkyū. Because of the tribute trade, Naha became an especially valuable prize for the ambitious to try to seize.” (Smits 2019a: 121).

Para la historiografía moderna ha sido costumbre traducir *wakō* como «piratas japoneses», aunque sería un significado impulsado desde las fuentes históricas chinas y coreanas que rara vez aparece en las fuentes históricas japonesas. Esto se debe a que ese significado implica un matiz peyorativo pues, en tanto que piratas, los *wakō* se dibujan como grupos violentos organizados de bandidos y rateros. Esta representación que ancla su significado en períodos medievales tardíos, sin embargo, es limitante; pues los *wakō* deben ser más bien entendidos gentes del mar, cuya forma de vida incluía (pero no se reducía) al tipo de tareas que acabamos de mencionar. Por tanto, lo que en esencia definía a las gentes *wakō* era una economía basada en actividades marítimas acompañada frecuentemente por el dinamismo de la oportunidad migratoria, así como una gran heterogeneidad étnica y cultural.

Los grupos de *wakō* más poderosos llegaban a controlar redes marítimas de producción e intercambio de bienes económicos a gran escala. Por consiguiente, podían actuar en calidad de mercaderes legítimos o contrabandistas, o ser contratados para la protección o el asalto en alta mar, o incluso fungir de intérpretes o diplomáticos. Los *wakō*, en definitiva, deben entenderse en gran medida como una subcultura propia de gentes que vivían en los márgenes, que poseían diversos orígenes, múltiples oficios y mala fama, que obtenían sus medios de vida del mar, y que, literalmente, portaban como bandera a Hachiman, dios de la guerra y patrón de los samuráis:

Maritime historian Tanaka Takeo explains that, for most people, the term *wakō* narrowly denotes ‘pirate bands consisting of Japanese who fly the flag of Hachiman and who set off to faraway locations across the East China Sea to pillage, burn, and assault.’ (Smits 2019a: 37).

No puede haber evidencia más palmaria y visible de la ascendencia de la cultura *wakō* y guerrera del Japón sobre las Ryūkyū, que el hecho de que la bandera del reino, establecida por el rey Shō Toku (1441–1469), esté formada precisamente por el emblema de Hachiman. Insisto, es de la máxima importancia subrayar que no estamos ante una prueba circunstancial, ni ante una coincidencia o un símbolo cuya alta propagación apunte a un referente de segundo o tercer orden con exigua vinculación a sus orígenes. La investigación histórico-cultural (que en parte he introducido en el capítulo primero) demuestra que, a través de migraciones norte-sur durante el siglo XIV producidas principalmente por el fin del *bakufu* de Kamakura (1185-1333), primer gobierno militar-

samurái de Japón,<sup>82</sup> los cultos religiosos procedentes del área de Kyūshū y basados en las creencias en Hachiman alcanzaron e impactaron con fuerza a Ryūkyū. Sirva esto como antecedente para indicar que, en las siguientes secciones, nos dedicaremos primero a presentar el surgimiento y ascenso de Hachiman como una de las deidades más importantes de Japón. Posteriormente, ahondaremos en la llegada de Hachiman a Ryūkyū y definiremos su representatividad para las artes marciales de Okinawa.

## 2.2. Desde Japón: Hachiman, oráculos, samuráis y *wakō*

Para dar inicio al análisis del lugar del escudo de Hachiman en la cultura marcial de Ryūkyū resulta muy interesante acudir al prefacio del libro *Okinawa, the Birthplace of Karate* (2017), editado por el Gobierno de la Prefectura, donde leemos:

As mariners and traders the Ryūkyūan saw and were impressed by many of the intellectual achievements with which they came in contact. This exposure to other cultures, in time, resulted in the development of a discrete Okinawan culture [...] Many religious beliefs, philosophies, literature, and language were adopted from China; architecture, weapons technology, and fighting techniques from Japan. (2017: xiii).

La selección de tal desglose resulta llamativa, pues, a decir verdad, una buena cantidad de creencias y referencias religiosas de Ryūkyū poseen una muy notable influencia japonesa.<sup>83</sup> Los ejemplos más conspicuos y elocuentes para nuestro estudio son el escudo de armas de la casa real Shō, así como la bandera del viejo Reino de Ryūkyū,

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<sup>82</sup> De nuevo el magnífico trabajo de Smits (2019a) es una referencia ineludible. En su libro realiza un análisis concienzudo de los movimientos y migraciones de grupos *wakō* hacia las Ryūkyūs en el siglo XIV, atendiendo a la situación histórica en el Este de Asia. Ello incluye como grandes procesos históricos los intentos de invasión de Japón a través de las islas del sur por parte de fuerzas mongol, la situación de los reinos que conformaban la actual Corea, el fin del *bakufu* de Kamakura (1185-1333) y el surgimiento de dos cortes en Japón, y la guerra dinástica en China entre Yuan (mongoles) y Ming. Es altamente recomendable acudir a esta fuente para profundizar en las complejidades del contexto histórico y su traslación a la política doméstica, las relaciones diplomáticas y las sucesiones dinásticas en las Ryūkyūs.

<sup>83</sup> Una primera aproximación al lugar del *hidari gomon* en la cultura del karate y las Ryūkyūs, así como de la llegada de Hachiman a las islas la presenté en el Simposio *Ecos mitológicos en la cultura moderna de Japón*, organizado en 2018 por el Centro de Estudios de Asia y África (CEAA) de El Colegio de México (COLMEX). El título de mi intervención fue: “El emblema de Hachiman como símbolo del *kobudō* de Okinawa: una mirada al mito del dios de la guerra en la cultura tradicional de las Ryūkyūs.



modelado a partir del *mitsudomoe* o estandarte de Hachiman.<sup>84</sup> El *hidari-gomon* o *migi mitsudomoe* es un diseño con la forma de un vortex de tres comas arremolinándose a la izquierda, que ha sido usado extensivamente por el budismo Shingon.<sup>85</sup> Las comas que forman el *mitsudomoe* conectan con las *magatama*, piedras curvas, abalorios o joyas de poderes mágicos que son también parte de los Tres Tesoros Sagrados (*Sanshu no Jingi*) Imperiales de Japón: *Yasakani-no-Magatama*, la espada *Kusanagi-no-Tsurugi* y el espejo *Yata no Kagami*. Tanto las *magatama* como el *mitsu domoe* son preponderantes en la memorabilia de la cultura okinawense, muy especialmente en asociación con la religión indígena y como símbolo del poder divino de sus sacerdotisas.

Hachiman es una de las deidades más famosas de Japón y la segunda en número de santuarios dedicados a ella, en los cuales la simbología del *mitsu tomoe* es ubicua.<sup>86</sup> Comúnmente se le referencia como el dios Shintō de la guerra, pero esta es una descripción incompleta si se considera que su culto, aun con orígenes *kami*, se sitúa mayormente en el grueso de las prácticas budistas, incorporando ingredientes nativos y taoístas (Grapard 1986: 22).

Según la Enciclopedia Online del Shintō de la Kokugakuin University, la fe en Hachiman existía desde tiempos remotos en el área de Kyūshū, siendo posible encontrar templos desde el periodo Hakuko (673-686). Por esta razón, Hachiman es un ejemplo paradigmático del *shinbutsu-shūgō*, fenómeno religioso propiamente japonés que expresa

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<sup>84</sup> Existen diversas teorías acerca de los orígenes y significación del *tomoe* de Hachiman: “Some crests, such as the *tomoe* and chrysanthemum, are used by many shrines. Of these the *tomoe* (picture of *tomo*) is the most common. The *tomo* was a piece of armor which shielded the right elbow from arrows. The name *tomoe* is said to come from the resemblance between the *tomo* and the design of the crest. Because of its resemblance to swirling water, it was regarded as a protection from fire. This may explain its frequent appearance on the roof tiles of shrines, temples and the homes of the upper classes. The crest first came into common use during the Fujiwara period (10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> cent.). With the ascendancy of the samurai class in the following three centuries, Hachiman shrines, which were especially favored by warriors, sprang up all over the country and, since the *tomoe* crest was especially liked by the *samurai*, probably it is not surprising that Hachiman shrines adopted it because it depicted a piece of armor. A reference in the *Nihongi* to a resemblance between the *tomoe* and the extuberant ‘wargod’ Emperor Ojin, the *kami* of Hachiman shrines, is perhaps another reason for its being adopted by those shrines. During the Sengoku period in the middle of the fifteenth century other shrines also adopted the crest. This step appears to have been taken in order to protect their property from armed bands, the idea being that *samurai* would respect property which was marked by their favorite crest. In time the crest was placed on shrine equipment as well as on the buildings until now it is as common in Shintō as the “swastika” is in Buddhism. There are many varieties of *tomoe* but the triple swirl *tomoe* is the most common and the one people generally have in mind when they speak of *tomoe*.” (Editorial Staff Nanzan University 1966: 121-122).

<sup>86</sup> “As such it represents a further development of the *ying-yang* sing (Jap. *in* ‘yo’)” (Repp 2002: 171 n.7).

el amalgamamiento de elementos kaimistas y budistas: «The case of Hachiman is additionally striking for the fact that is believed to be one of the first cases in which a kami was depicted in sculpture (*shinzō*), specifically, in the fashion of a Buddhist monk.» (Swanson, Chilson 2006: 24).

En su emanación budista, la predominante, se le conoce como *Hachiman Daibosatsu* («Gran Bodhisattva Hachiman»), mientras que en el marco de la religión indígena se le nombra como *Hahcimanjin*. Hacia el siglo VII, la figura de Hachiman empieza a ganar difusión tras dictar varios oráculos significativos, de manera que atrae la atención de la corte en Kyoto y, entendido como una manifestación del Emperador Ōjin (s. IV aprox.), es reverenciado como ancestro y deidad protectora de la casa imperial. En el siglo XII, el clan samurái de los Minamoto, un grupo de guerreros regionales formado en el siglo X que alegaba estar emparentado con el Emperador Seiwa, adoptó a Hachiman como su *ujigami* («kami protector») debido a las cualidades marciales del dios, también conocido como *bushin* («dios de la guerra»).<sup>87</sup>

La lectura antigua de los kanjis para Hachiman es *yawata* que se traduciría como «ocho estandartes» o bien «ocho campos», dependiendo del kanji usado. Esta última interpretación etimológica, quizá la de mayor consenso, deriva de los trabajos de los trabajos de Nakano Hatayoshi, el cual lee los caracteres chinos 八幡 «ocho estandartes» como «yahata» o «yawata» (八畑), es decir, «ocho campos»; haciendo referencia a un lugar específico con una probable vinculación agraria derivada de *hatake* («campo») (Bender 1979: 128-129; Scheid 2013: 34).<sup>88</sup> La primera variante es de enorme interés ya que parece aludir a un antiguo sistema militar chino de identificación y formación de tropas, estructurada en las ocho posibles direcciones del movimiento lineal: las cuatro generales (norte, sur, este, oeste) y las cuatro angulares. (Repp 2002: 170). Tal esquema de direcciones goza no solo de gran importancia técnica, sino también cosmológica; pues para las artes marciales japonesas y chinas, especialmente aquellas de inspiración taoísta

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<sup>87</sup> Ello le valió, por parte de algunos de los primeros Jesuitas que visitaban tierras niponas, comparaciones con Marte o St. George (Repp 2002: 169). Más allá de discutir la lógica de dicha comparación, resulta llamativa la asociación tanto de Hachiman, que introducimos más adelante, como de Sant Jordi en relación a la mitología del Dragón.

<sup>88</sup> Toshio referencia aun otra interpretación más: “The name Hachiman [...] and which is also read “Yahata” (eight *hata*), is related to Korea, too, because *hata* or *pata* in both Korean and Japanese means “loom” and indicates the weaving technique introduced by Korean immigrants. In fact, many scholars think that the Hachiman Shrine, particularly of Usa, was originally a Korean institution” (Toshio 1993: 121)

–como el taichi, el bagua o el xingji, permitiría alinearse con los ocho trigramas del sistema I-Ching.<sup>89</sup>

Los orígenes de Hachiman son hartamente complejos y objeto de intensa especulación académica.<sup>90</sup> Hachiman no aparece ni en el *Kojiki* (712) ni en el *Nihongi* (720), lo que según Scheid indicaría que quizá todavía a principios del siglo VIII continuaba siendo una deidad regional. (Scheid 2014: 33). Sin embargo, sí lo hace, por primera vez, en el *Shōku Nihongi* (797) ya como una divinidad de tipo militar e íntimamente relacionada con la corte:

Hachiman's military role may be rooted in actual belligerent ritualism by priests who created the nucleus of this deity's cult. The *Shōku Nihongi* mentions Hachiman for the first time as one of three shrine deities in Kyūshū that received rewards from the imperial court for their support against the Korean archenemy, the kingdom of Silla in 737. In 740, Hachiman is mentioned again in the context of a military enterprise led by the central government, this time the quelling of Fujiwara Hirotsugu's rebellion. These early reports indicate that Hachiman's cultic center in Usa, in the province of Buzen, had become a spiritual and military stronghold of the Yamato court. According to the *Shōku Nihongi*, 740 was also the year when Nara's most energetic emperor, Shōmu («Holy Warrior»; r. 724-749) received a divine message from the Kyūshū deity. (Scheid 2014: 33)

La enorme pujanza del prestigio de Hachiman tiene su germen en el emperador Shōmu (701-756), con su visión de un budismo que gobierna el país y que es capaz de incluir las religiones indígenas y los *kami*. Tal es así que el dios de la guerra encarna a la vez el título de Bodhisattva y del linaje imperial. Participando del encaje del emperador en la cosmología budista, Hachiman, mediante un augurio, asegurará al emperador Shōmu el próximo descubrimiento de minas de cobre y oro con suficientes recursos para

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<sup>89</sup> Otras características del culto a Hachiman descritas por Blomberg aportan conexiones con raigambres en China íntimamente relacionadas con asuntos militares: “The *shintai*, a term often translated as 'god-body', i.e. the material manifestation of a *kamfs* spirit, of Hachiman is the *hossu*, a flywhisk made of horse-hair. In ancient Central Asia one of the insignia of a ruler was a fly-whisk made of a yak's tail, and this object found its way into Buddhist ceremonies as a symbol of supreme mastery of esoteric knowledge. This would seem to indicate a possible Central Asian origin of Hachiman, and it has been suggested that the *kami* may have been an amalgamation of an ancient Japanese god of war and a Chinese protective deity.” (Blomberg 2013: 24)

<sup>90</sup> Como afirma Scheid (2014: 31), los estudios al respecto de Hachiman en el ámbito académico no asiático son sorprendentemente escasos. La mixtura de elementos que conforman su figura representan un desafío metodológico no menor pues, en términos religiosos, es complicado encuadrarlo dentro del shintoísmo o del budismo; problema que determinados especialistas japoneses soslayan mediante el uso del concepto *Hachiman shinko*, o “veneración de Hachiman”.

la construcción del Gran Buda del templo *Tōdai-ji* en Nara (752), uno de los grandes legados simbólicos del gobernante. (Repp 2002: 171)

La primera leyenda dedicada a Hachiman no aparecería sino hasta alrededor de un siglo después en el *Usa Engi* (844), con una historia de tintes chamánicos y oraculares que tiene por protagonistas a un viejo herrero y un halcón dorado:

An old blacksmith lived in the late years of Kimmei's reign (late sixth century) near a lake below Mt Omoto in the Usa region. He was visited by a man named Omiwa, who stayed there for three years, spending his time in prayer. Then, in the thirty-seventh year of Kimmei's era, a golden hawk appeared to Omiwa. Swiftly the hawk transformed itself into a dove, which in turn changed into a young boy, who announced: 'I am the sixteenth human emperor, Homuda Tenno, the broad-bannered Hachiman-marō'. (Bender 1979: 127).

Esta cualidad profética de Hachiman que ofrecía respuesta a asuntos por encima de los designios humanos, incluyendo cuestiones acerca de la gobernanza, no desaparecería con su conversión en protector de la nación y patrón de los samuráis. Más bien se transformaría para dotar de legitimidad política y justificación a las posiciones enfrentadas entre diferentes clanes en pos de la hegemonía nacional. De forma notable lo haría entre los Taira y los Minamoto,<sup>91</sup> quienes desde épocas tempranas se arrogaban el favor de Hachiman: «In 939, Taira no Masakado claimed an oracle of the god as justification for his revolt; an intriguing passage in *Gukan Shō* asserts that Hachiman had decreed the recent ascendancy of the Minamoto.» (Bender, 1979: 153).

A medida que el poder marcial y político del clan Minamoto se incrementaba, así se expandía el culto a Hachiman. Minamoto Yorinobu (968-1048) es identificado como el primer líder del clan en adorar a Hachiman; Minamoto Yoshiie (1039-1106) pasó a ser llamado Hachiman Taro Yoshiie por sus legendarias capacidades guerreras. Posteriormente, tras el establecimiento del Shōgunato Kamamura por Minamoto Yoritomo (1147-1199), Hachiman se erigiría como deidad protectora de los estratos guerreros en general y su culto alcanzaría regiones controladas por los súbditos del *bakufu*, de los que se convertiría en *chinjugami* («guardián tutelar»). Uno de los momentos

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<sup>91</sup> En efecto, aunque los Minamoto buscaron monopolizar la asociación con Hachiman lo cierto es que otros clanes como los Taira o los Fujiwara le rendían culto, habiendo actuado en diversas ocasiones en calidad de emisarios imperiales al Santuario de Usa (*Usa Hachimangū*) centro de veneración del dios, actualmente en la prefectura de Ōita al noreste de Kyushu.

álidos de Hachiman como protector de Japón se produce entre 1274 y 1281, cuando el patrón del samurái colabora en repeler a los invasores mongoles mediante vientos divinos, *kamikaze*, y poderosos tifones que desbaratan la flota marítima de los atacantes.<sup>92</sup> Hachiman aparece pues como una eficaz deidad en las batallas navales gracias a su control sobre las aguas y los vientos:

The *Usa Hachiman-gū*, situated near the site of the actual invasions, was awarded grants of stewardships, *jito*, by the Kamakura *Bakufu* in recognition of the intervention of a ‘divine wind’, *kamikaze*. When claiming the reward the shrine officials quoted witnesses who had seen the flags of the shrine pointing in the direction of the enemy ships, a sign that Hachiman was taking active part in the battle. (Bloomberg 2013: 27).<sup>93</sup>

El proceso de consolidación de Hachiman como deidad estatal destacada expresa también la disputa apropiativa, de acuerdo con la capacidad legitimadora del dios en términos políticos y religiosos entre la casa imperial, los nuevos estratos guerreros, y la alta jerarquía del clero budista.<sup>94</sup> Esa evolución política del avance territorial de Hachiman va a lo largo de las costas de Japón. De esta suerte, el culto al dios de la guerra despliega una narrativa sobre la superficie del país que engloba mnemónicamente la función metafórica del viaje y la conquista, tan bien reflejadas por el *Kojiki* y el *Nihon Shōki*; sobre todo a través de las rutas marinas que conectan el sur de Japón con la península de Corea. A su vez, dicha configuración revela el peso de la periferia, y muy

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<sup>92</sup> La predominancia de las facetas bélicas de Hachiman a partir del siglo XIII, muy relacionadas con la situación de guerra casi permanente en los períodos Kamakura, Muromachi y Sengoku, alimentaron amplias preocupaciones dentro del cuerpo doctrinal del budismo japonés que intentó, por medio de diversas iniciativas centradas en las lecturas de Hachiman como pacificador, contrarrestar dicha imagen. Ver (Repp 2002: 185-186).

<sup>93</sup> Medio siglo antes las rogativas a Hachiman por parte de la corte en Nara habían contribuido igualmente a sofocar el alzamiento de Fujiwara Hirotsugu (716-777) quién intentó huir a Silla (Corea) pero encontró fuertes tormentas que le obligaron a regresar, siendo apresado y ajusticiado: “gifts of land, servants, horses, and Buddhist sutras were made to the shrine and a pagoda was built, presumably in thanksgiving for the subjugation of Hirotsugu” (Bender 1979: 132).

<sup>94</sup> “In 1046, as governor of Kawachi, the elderly Yorinobu began the worship at Iwashimizu Hachiman Shrine of the martial Hachiman as tutelary god of the Genji.[...] Yorinobu was the first to claim the deity as a patron.[...] Shrines to Hachiman soon sprang up throughout the country wherever there were Minamoto to invoke his name” (Shively, McCullough 2008: 669) Cambridge 669 “Although Yorinobu had effectively carried out his mission, the court, which had little regard for warriors, useful though they were, was slow to reward him. A year later he was appointed governor of Mino, his second-choice position.”

probablemente de los grupos *wakō*,<sup>95</sup> en la configuración económica y cultural del momento histórico:

The Hachiman cult thus undergirded the polycentric character of the court's territoriality, and the various ritualized journeys (routines) that were replicated through the centuries formed one of that territoriality's geotypical aspects, while memorial rites and the very regularity of their performance formed one of its chronotypical aspects. (Grapard 2016: 100).

Los usos protectores y guerreros que el clan Minamoto asignó a Hachiman representan, en realidad, un estadio tardío en la formación y desarrollo de la deidad. En sus albores, las formas litúrgicas del patrón de los samuráis congregaron una miríada de funciones más allá de las vertientes marciales y militares, revelando diferentes cosmovisiones en función de la comunidad de práctica. Esas concepciones clásicas del período Nara acentúan, por encima de los tutelares, los aspectos de vaticinio. Con anterioridad a la cooptación budista del dios, eran sacerdotisas chamánicas (*miko*) quienes, habiendo alcanzado un estado de posesión por medio de música y danzas (Repp 2002: 170), transmitían los mensajes emitidos por Hachiman que posteriormente eran interpretados por oficiantes masculinos:

The Hachiman cult originated as an oracular cult in which female officiants, under possession, uttered sounds that were then interpreted by a male officiant called *saniwa* [...] Hachiman, however, was conceived of as a bodhisattva, not as a kami, and this might explain why after the year 839 oracles were revealed, not to female officiants of Hachiman shrines as they used to be, but to male Buddhist monks who gradually took over their oracular functions. (Shively, McCullough 2008: 558).

Blomberg coincide en señalar la sobresaliente función femenino-oracular que subyace en los orígenes de Hachiman, observable en el propio *Usa Hachiman-gū* donde también se consagra un *kami* femenino conocido como Hime-gami (Blomberg 2013: 23).<sup>96</sup> Diversas fuentes apuntan asimismo al papel de las sacerdotisas del *Usa Hachiman-gū* en campañas militares, siendo portadoras de valioso armamento ritual:

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<sup>95</sup> Para un estudio sobre la veneración a Hachiman entre los *wakō* durante el periodo medieval y algunos de los aspectos femeninos de la práctica ver Scheid 2018.

<sup>96</sup> “A female *kami*, Hime-gami, is enshrined with Hachiman, occupying a somewhat inferior position and sometimes being considered as his consort. There is some evidence that the cult of Hime-gami may have preceded that of Hachiman, who is not mentioned either in the *Kojiki* or the *Nihongi*. Some contemporary Shintō scholars are of the opinion that Hime-gami was originally a priestess who functioned as an oracle.”

In a passage in his study of the water-woman Mishina points out that in traditions related to the Usa Hachiman Shrine such a woman was represented by the shrine shamaness, who was also involved in military expeditions. The *Gotakusen-shu* and the *Fuso ryakki* (compiled in the late twelfth century) contain accounts of the chief priestess of the Usa Hachiman shrine leading a military expedition in the year 720 against the Hayato people of the southernmost area of Kyūshū, who often rose against the central government.[...] the shamaness of the Usa Hachiman Shrine, since both were shamanesses and, more importantly for our study, both played their ritual roles carrying weapons. The weapons must have been necessary for protection when they came into contact with beings from the netherworld, and when they went to war [...] There was little distinction between ritual and actual war as far as the magical role of the shamaness was concerned. (Toshio 1993: 120, 129).

Esta función de las sacerdotisas del *Usa Hachimangu* resulta tremendamente similar, como recordaremos, a la de las sacerdotisas mágico-guerreras que aparecen en los *omoro* de Ryūkyū, citados en el capítulo primero. Alcanzado este punto es recomendable retrotraernos nuevamente a la zona cultural determinada por Smits (2019a) para entender la base civilizatoria que, en buena medida y a través de importantes desplazamientos de población, colaboró en el surgimiento del Reino de Ryūkyū. Dicha región incluye tanto el sur de la actual Corea como de Kyūshū, circunscribiendo precisamente el lugar de aparición y proliferación de Hachiman. En efecto, según Bender desde mediados del siglo VI se desarrolla un proceso de amalgamación de divinidades primitivas, aunando creencias animistas de raíz japonesa y formas chamánicas de procedencia coreana, que acabarían dando lugar a la creación de Hachiman (Bender 1978: 166).<sup>97</sup> Los ingredientes de dicha fusión se relacionan principalmente con el mar e

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(Blomberg 2013: 23). Para más información acerca de Himegami y las sacerdotisas como altas oficiantes en Usa ver Scheid 2014: 39.

<sup>97</sup> De ello participan, esencialmente, dos clanes: Usa y Karajima. El clan Usa adoraba deidades de tipo femenino y marítimo, combinando en sus rituales elementos de litolatría y talasolatría. En la génesis de su cosmogonía se encontraba un Rey Dragón - elemento común a numerosas comunidades marítimo-costeras del Este de Asia, que unifica el eje cosmológico mar-montaña. Tal creencia provenía a su vez de un conjunto de gentes conocidas como *Ama*, que dominaban el mar interior de Japón, y cuyo grupo formaba el grueso del clan Usa. Al Rey Dragón el clan Usa unía, de forma muy particular, la veneración animística de tres megalitos situados en lo alto del Monte Omoto, los cuales se considera que operaban como guía náutica. Por su parte, el clan Karajima descendería de un colectivo que migró desde Corea, cuyos ritos implicaban armas de bronce y elementos chamanísticos tales como médiums (*miko*) y adivinatoras. Ambas concepciones habrían sido fusionadas en un nuevo culto y una nueva deidad: Hachiman.

incluyen la creencia en el Rey Dragón, rituales litolatrás y talasolatrás, armas de bronce, médiums y videntes.<sup>98</sup>

En definitiva, es de suma importancia indicar que Hachiman va adquiriendo relevancia en la medida en que su culto es capaz de extenderse mediante la hibridación de tradiciones y ritos heteróclitos, siendo capaz de dar respuesta a las necesidades religiosas y los intereses políticos de diferentes comunidades locales y regionales. Repp ve en Hachiman una deidad de zonas periféricas que opera como mediador entre dos regiones asiáticas (2002: 170), Japón y Corea, fundamentales para entender la historia cultural de Ryūkyū. Esta reflexión entronca con el análisis llevado a cabo por Smits (2019a) del arribo desde el norte, junto con grupos de migrantes y *wakō* vinculados a los cultos Hachiman, así como sus iteraciones y trascendencia para el pasado de Ryūkyū. Esta es la cuestión que vamos a abordar en la siguiente sección y que resulta extremadamente relevante para entender la simbología cultural y política de las artes marciales de Okinawa.

### **2.2.1. El *hidari gomon* y Tei Dō: un ejemplo de la ambivalente simbología política del karate**

Antes de proceder con la llegada de Hachiman a Ryūkyū y la adopción del *hidari gomon* como bandera del Reino, vamos a dedicar unas pocas páginas a analizar la interpretación que, desde la cultura popular del karate, se hace de los orígenes y sentido de tan

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<sup>98</sup> Esta agregación sincrética certificaría la vinculación política de ambos clanes como resultado de la conquista del segundo sobre el primero (Bender 1979: 129). En el *Kojiki* encontramos una referencia clara a estos procesos en la historia de “La suerte en el mar y la suerte en las montañas”, protagonizada por *Hoderi* o *Umisachihiko* (lit. “suerte del mar”) y *Hoori* o *Yamasachihiko* (lit. “príncipe de la montaña de la fortuna”), la cual vendría, además, a consolidar la tesis acerca de los orígenes arcaicos y la agregación de creencias involucradas en la conformación de Hachiman. El cuento versa sobre la unión de dos clanes, a través del matrimonio entre Hikohohodemi, representante del clan imperial ancestral en el área de Kyushu, y Toyotamahime, hija del Dios Dragon del Mar, símbolo del clan Watatsumi. De la unión surgiría Hachiman como rúbrica del vínculo entre los grupos imperial y marítimo: “the resulting composite deity, including both figures, was Hachiman, who thus represented the union of the imperial and maritime tribes.” (Bender 1979: 129). La fábula de Hoderi y Hoori puede encontrarse por ejemplo en *Leyendas y cuentos del Japón* (2006) con el título “El anzuelo de Hoderi”. Resulta muy interesante que la traducción clásica de Davis, F. Hadland (1912) la titula como “In the Palace of the Sea God”. En folklore japonés en ocasiones se asocian las Ryūkyūs con el Palacio del Dios Dragón, Ryūgū-jō, pues, más allá de la notable afinidad lingüística, se creía que la residencia del dios se situaba en algún lugar de las islas del sur. Anualmente en Okinawa se celebra el Festival del Dios Dragon (*Ryūjin no Utage*), y en el santuario taoísta de Mazu en Naha una de las deidades consagradas es precisamente Ryūjin.



omnipresente símbolo. El *hidari gomon* puede encontrarse con enorme frecuencia en todo tipo de objetos y productos de consumo del karate como insignias, armas, uniformes, libros, videos, webs, etc. Mas, ¿cómo razona el karate la aparición y preponderancia del *tomoe* de Hachiman en la iconografía de las artes marciales de Okinawa? La explicación más común nos retrotrae de nuevo a 1609:

That such a thing as *di* did exist is suggested in the folk tale of the origin of the *hidari gomon*, the triple-comma symbol formerly used as the heraldic crest of the Ryūkyūan kings and contemporarily used as a symbol of Okinawa. This tale also shows the importance of nationalism in relation to fighting styles, because other versions of the meaning of the *hidari gomon* are equally nationalistic but lack the martial flavor. Martial folklore states that the *hidari gomon* came about when Jana Ueekata, a retainer of King Shō Nei (1564-1620), refused to submit to the governance of Okinawa by the Satsuma clan of Japan. He was ordered to the Satsuma seat at Kagoshima, and sentenced to be boiled alive in a vat of oil. Jana's last request was that, as a warrior of Okinawa, he be allowed to practice *di* before his execution. This request was granted, and afterward his two executioners approached him to carry out the sentence – but Jana grabbed both of them and leaped into the vat of oil. The bodies of the three men floated to the top of the oil and began to swirl around the vat, looking like three linked commas. The folklore places the use of *di* to sometime around 1609, the year of the Satsuma invasion of Okinawa. (Green, Svinth 2010: 206).

Esta relectura legendaria que aún en el personaje histórico real de Jana Ueekata Rizan (1549–1611) (bajo el nombre chino de Tei Dō) el origen del *hidari gomon* y la demostración de la existencia pasada del karate, se halla propagada, con leves variantes, en múltiples publicaciones y sitios de internet. El mito, casi siempre, incorpora tonos nacionalistas que ensalzan las abnegadas cualidades del pueblo okinawense bajo el dominio samurái, la integridad de sus clases dirigentes y, circunstancialmente, el valor de la resistencia pacífica.<sup>99</sup> Por otra parte, merece la pena señalar como, en otras ocasiones

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<sup>99</sup> Véase por caso este texto del sito “El rincón del Do”: “Durante muchos años el pueblo de Ryūkyū religiosamente cumplió los términos del acuerdo con el señor de Satsuma. Todo iba bien hasta que una gran sequía se produjo en el Reino, lo que provocó una escasez de arroz en todas las islas. Esto causo la pobreza y el hambre y por consiguiente impidió la posibilidad de realizar el pago correspondiente a Kagoshima. Al ver el sufrimiento de su pueblo, el Rey de Ryūkyū decidió enviar una delegación. [...] El Señor de Kagoshima por contrapartida ordenó la ejecución inmediata de los tres guardias y que su muerte fuera arrojándolos en un caldero gigante con agua hirviendo. Lucharon fieramente pero finalmente cayeron y mientras sus cuerpos giraban dentro del caldero solo se les escuchaba gritar rogando ayuda para su pueblo. Tras escuchar los gritos y viendo que nunca pidieron por sus vidas sino por ayuda a las Ryūkyū, el señor Kagoshima comprendió la valentía de esos hombres y entendió la veracidad del mensaje. El valor y el coraje de los tres guerreros Ryūkyūan inició un nuevo período de relaciones entre el reino y el Clan, y finalmente llevó a la cooperación y la amistad. De vuelta en el Reino de Ryūkyū, el enviado describe la muerte de los tres guerreros. El rey después de escuchar la historia ordena la confección de un emblema que inmortalizara a los valientes guerreros, y así surge el Hidari

y sin necesariamente caer en una contradicción, la enseñanza moral de la historia del *hidari gomon* y la fidelidad de Jana Uekata se sintetiza en la máxima «muerte antes que deshonor».<sup>100</sup> Hallamos así un nuevo ejemplo de la ambivalencia discursiva del karate, ya que lo que en principio parecería un reclamo nacionalista pro okinawense, acaba por medio de tal exégesis entroncando con motivos centrales de los textos *Bushidō* del periodo Tokugawa, como el conocido el tratado de Miyamoto Musashi (1584-1645) *Go Rin Shō* («Libro de los cinco anillos», 1645) (Blomberg 2013 :156).

Para otros colectivos, las gestas de Jana Uekata lo erigen como paradigmático depositario de las artes marciales de Okinawa, cuya sangre corre todavía hoy por las venas de importantes maestros de karate (BiShōp 2019: 219, 321; Kogel 2010: 35). Podemos citar, entre otros, el Meibukan dōjō, una de las escuelas más influyentes de Okinawa situada en el área de Kumemura. En la página web de este dōjō, Jana Uekata se describe como un lejano antecesor de esta rama del *Gōjū-ryū*, reinstituyendo muchos de los lugares comunes asignados a su persona:

When Dai Sensei Yagi Meitoku was first introduced to Chōjun Miyagi by his grandfather, he was identified as a descendant of Jana Oyakata and of the original Chinese immigrants of Okinawa. Jana Oyakata was celebrated as a pro-Ryūkyū minister of 1600's who made the ultimate sacrifice of his life for the kingdom he served. [...] The historical significance of this event is that it would end Okinawa's sovereignty as an independent nation and begin its 250-year occupation under military rule. [...] Without the third signature of Jana Oyakata, Okinawa history has remained true and his sacrifice has contributed to keeping Okinawa cultural significant to this day. The monument to Jana Oyakata overlooks the bay in Kume where he stood against the Satsuma clan. (Meibukan Honbu Dojo 2017: n.p.)

La historia documentada, no obstante, no permite afirmar que Jana fuera un maestro de artes marciales. A pesar de la amplia difusión de su figura con relación al *hidari gomon*, es difícil encontrar su nombre en las genealogías del karate, lo que parece indicar, acertadamente, que nos hallamos más bien ante un relevante personaje político. Jana Uekata fue un aristócrata descendiente de las familias del área de Kume y un burócrata de capital importancia para la historia de Ryūkyū. En 1603, alcanzaría el puesto

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Gomon. El símbolo se dice que representan los cuerpos de los tres guerreros de Ryūkyū dando vueltas en el caldero dando la vida por el bien del pueblo. Posteriormente se convirtió en el símbolo del Reino de Ryūkyū, un símbolo que ahora se puede encontrar en casi todas partes en Okinawa.” (*Hidari Gomon / Hijai Gumun* 2016: n.p.).

<sup>100</sup> Refiérase por ejemplo esta página de karate Shōrin-ryu *The Symbol of Okinawa* (2002: n.p.)

de primer integrante del *Sanshinkan* («Consejo de los Tres»), principal órgano del estado tras el Primer Ministro, operando como uno de los miembros del Gobierno de Ryūkyū más acérrimamente pro-China. Sus decisiones alimentarían crecientes desencuentros con el clan Satsuma, pues no solo colaboraría en la desestabilización del ya de por sí frágil orden político del Reino durante las dos décadas previas a 1609; sino que, eventualmente, también en la invasión de Ryūkyū.<sup>101</sup> Para Smits, Jana fue «the main architect of the disaster» (Smits 2019a: 231). Hay que señalar que como miembro del *Sanshinkan* Jana estaba a cargo de uno de los tres ejércitos de Ryūkyū; y en relación a ello algunas fuentes históricas lo describen como un gran general que comandó heroica resistencia a la invasión en la isla de Kume frente al puerto de Naha. De su paso por la academia imperial *Hanlin* se asume su formación en altas materias militares. La institución china, sin embargo, era una escuela de élite para la formación civil y no militar.<sup>102</sup> Investigaciones recientes indican que parece dudoso que Jana liderara en persona los últimos focos de oposición contra los samuráis en 1609.<sup>103</sup>

La imagen de Jana, en tanto que héroe y víctima por antonomasia de la conquista de 1609, no es exclusiva de la cultura popular del karate; sino que forma parte importante

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<sup>101</sup> Ya en 1592 el clan Jana había liderado una revuelta armada en Okinawa contra el rey Shō Nei (1564–1620),<sup>101</sup> muy posiblemente por un notable incremento del gravamen sobre la plata, cargado sobre las élites Ryūkyūenses para satisfacer las demandas económicas del clan Satsuma y el Shōgun Hideyoshi. Shō Nei respondió con severidad al alzamiento: “the king’s men led ‘righteous soldiers’ and that Jana and family resisted vigorously from within their compound. The king’s forces used *hiyaa*, a type of three-barreled hand cannon typical of Ryūkyūan firearms. They Shōt into the compound, causing it to catch fire, which forced everyone outside. After a fierce battle, the enemy ‘general’ was killed, and the royal force prevailed” (Smits 2019a: 144).

<sup>102</sup> Es decir, con sus estudios de los Cinco Clásicos, la historia, la burocracia, el comercio, la poesía, etc. los eruditos de la academia imperial en tiempos Ming deben ser entendidos mayormente como amanuenses y burócratas con responsabilidades políticas de alto nivel incluyendo la escritura de la historiografía oficial. Jana Ueekata formó parte de los grupos de escolares (*kanShō*) que eran enviados, normalmente con varias décadas de diferencia, a la academia imperial *Hanlin*, en su caso en 1565, y probablemente a la de Nanking y no a la de Peking (Matsuda 1966: 289). Para profundizar en el rol de los académicos de la Hanlin en la alta burocracia del Imperio véase Elman 1989: 384. Para una descripción de la jerarquía militar Ming y sus exámenes, de la cual no participaba la academia *Hanlin*, dirigirse a Twitchett, Mote 1998: 58: “The military examinations required a minimal level of literacy in the Confucian tradition and knowledge of important texts on strategy in war, but they principally required high competence in archery and horsemanship. Consequently, although ‘open’ in principle, they realistically offered opportunities for advancement only to men who had grown up in military environments.” De hecho, pasar de candidato a examen militar a candidato a examen civil era un síntoma de prosperar en la escala social y, comumente, lo deseado.

<sup>103</sup> “It is unlikely that Jana led the people of Kumemura to resist, but it is quite likely that the remnants of his army, the one drawn from the southern districts, continued to resist in the vicinity of Kumemura for approximately one day. *Kian nikki* notes on 4.2 that Jana and his ally, Urasoe Ueekata, were in Naha as prisoners.” (Smits 2019a: 233).

de la construcción de una parte del sentimiento cultural y político nacional Okinawense más ambigua, habiendo calado también en el ámbito divulgativo y académico. Así, por ejemplo, en el libro de Stephen Turnbull *The Samurai Capture a King* Jana es: «the most noble victim of this scapegoat attitude» (Turnbull 2011:56); mientras que en el capítulo introductorio de *Resistant Islands: Okinawa Confronts Japan and the United States*, se menciona la ejecución de Jana como resultado de «his refusal to swear allegiance to the new Satsuma overlord» (McCormack, Satoko 2018: 12 n.3). Para esta última cita habría que aclarar que esto no fue exactamente así; lo que Jana rehusó fue firmar y estampar con su sello personal el documento de paz, cuyo primer artículo establecía a Ryūkyū como un territorio históricamente ligado a los dominios del Clan Satsuma. Tres años antes, en 1608, Jana Ueekata había recibido personalmente a un grupo de emisarios de Satsuma, rechazado sin miramientos todas sus peticiones y proclamado la histórica unión de Ryūkyū con China, mientras negaba todo vínculo con Japón. Durante dicho encuentro, el desprecio hacia los enviados japoneses fue evidente, sobre todo en lo que refiere a la acostumbrada práctica diplomática del «obsequio de vuelta», pues solo les ofreció simple arroz aduciendo que no había nada más disponible. (Smits 2019a: 222). Con estos antecedentes se entiende mejor la negativa de Jana, única de la delegación Ryūkyūense en Kagoshima incluyendo al rey, y la reacción desairada de los representantes de Satsuma; la agria confrontación venía de lejos.<sup>104</sup> Sin dilación, Jana fue apartado y decapitado convirtiéndose, a partir de entonces, en costumbre escribir su nombre con caracteres chinos e intención peyorativa.

A este respecto, Shō Koken (1617–1675), el amanuense encargado de publicar el *Chūzan Seikan* en 1650 (la primera historia oficial del Reino de Ryūkyū según vimos), dejaría escrito que la nefasta gestión política del rey Shō Nei y Jana Ueekata tuvieron mucha responsabilidad en el devenir de los hechos que llevarían a la invasión de 1609. Por un lado, Shō Nei ignoró las obligaciones diplomáticas heredadas de las relaciones diplomáticas y tributarias con Japón iniciadas en el siglo XV; por su parte, Jana, tal y como se recoge literalmente en el *Chūzan Seikan*: «lost sight of whom he truly should serve.» (Smits 2019a: 244). El debate en torno a Jana Ueekata y su trascendencia histórica,

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<sup>104</sup> Sabemos, asimismo, que en algún momento durante las negociaciones de paz Jana trató de hacer llegar una carta al Emperador, interceptada en Fuzhou por oficiales de las Ryūkyūs residiendo allí y destruida (Smits 1999: 17). Es posible que dichos oficiales pertenecieran a facciones enfrentadas a Jana y que informaran al clan de Kyushu del suceso.

empero, sigue abierto. La disensión en las interpretaciones revela que estamos ante una figura controvertida cuyo análisis no puede solventarse sin admitir las ambigüedades inherentes a cada enfoque, así como la convulsa y radicalizada situación política entre facciones de las élites gobernantes en Ryūkyū en el período que precede a 1609.<sup>105</sup>

Más allá de las consideraciones anteriores y respondiendo a los propósitos de esta tesis, esta aproximación a Jana Ueekata y el *hidari gomōn* nos ha permitido exponer en profundidad un nuevo caso de las complejas interacciones entre la simbología del karate y la historia política de Okinawa, incorporando relecturas modernas de dicha asociación en función de las preferencias y orientaciones de distintos grupos de interés. Con ello en mente, y dejando la mitología karateka entorno al *hidari gomōn* a un lado, la siguiente sección implica indagar en las auténticas raíces del emblema de Hachiman en Ryūkyū.

### 2.2.2. Hachiman en las Ryūkyū

Una de las más claras líneas de entrada de Hachiman a Ryūkyū son los cultos de la secta Kumano Gongen, cuyos santuarios experimentaron un rápido crecimiento por las costas de todo Japón desde el siglo X, y cuyo culto (íntimamente ligado a los viajes marítimos y la corriente del Kuroshio) llegaría hasta Okinawa (Miyake 1996: 132).<sup>106</sup> La mayoría de edificios religiosos en los primeros años del Reino de Ryūkyū se concentraban en el área de Naha, un puerto comercial que ilustraba la venida de creencias foráneas, abarcando el taoísmo Chino y el Budismo Zen y Shingon. Fue dentro de esta geografía polireligiosa que la presencia de santuarios Kumano Gongen se hizo destacable. De acuerdo con el *Ryūkyū Shintō ki* (1605): «There are seven Shrines in this land (i.e., Ryūkyū). Six are for Kumano Gongen of Japan and one is likewise for Hachiman Daibosastu» (Uezato 2008: 63).

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<sup>105</sup> La principal fuente escrita de los sucesos entonces acaecidos continúa siendo las crónicas *Kian nikki* (“Diarios del monje Kian”), ca. 1627, en donde se carga la responsabilidad de la desdicha de 1609 a Jana y su escasa visión de las complejidades geopolíticas del momento. Es necesario remarcar que Kian, originario de la zona de Sakai, quien también formó parte de la delegación de prisioneros enviados a Kagoshima tras la invasión, era una persona que llevaba años al servicio del rey, contaba con su confianza y, evidentemente, formaba parte de una facción política enfrentada a la de Jana. Para profundizar en el tema puede consultarse (Matsuda 1966; Kerr 1958; Smits 2019).

<sup>106</sup> La Kuroshio baña el litoral del archipiélago de las Ryūkyū en toda su longitud y es un componente indispensable de la navegación marítima entre Taiwan y Japón.

El momento histórico que está en la génesis y afianzamiento del Reino de Ryūkyū se nutre de grandes migraciones provenientes de Kyūshū, así como del contacto y solapamiento con las actividades de *bushi* japoneses en el sur:

From about the fourteenth century the economic activities of the Japanese warrior (*bushi*) from southern Kyūshū had extended as far as the Amami Islands, but in the fifteenth century, as the power of the Ryūkyū expanded, Ryūkyūans began to clash with Japanese warriors in this region, and eventually Amami Oshima and neighboring islands became part of Ryūkyū's territory. (Murai 2008: iv).

Es justamente bajo este contexto que se produce la fundación del templo de Hachiman en Ryūkyū y la adopción oficial del *hidari gomon* por parte de la dinastía real de Ryūkyū; ambas parten de un mismo suceso que se remonta al siglo XV. En aquel entonces, último monarca de la primera casa Shō el rey Shō Toku (1441–1469), quien también portaría el título oficial de *Hachiman-no-Aji* («Señor Hachiman»), continuando con la tarea de ampliación y centralización de los límites del reino, ordenó en 1466 la invasión de la isla Kikai, con un contingente de 2.000 soldados y 50 barcos. Buscando el amparo del dios tutelar de samurais y *wakō*, el joven rey se encomendó a Hachiman en un contrato deítico; es decir, juró al dios de la guerra que construiría un templo en su honor si intercedía en su favor. Ese mismo año de 1466 se construyó el santuario de Asato Hachiman-gū, en una zona situada entre Naha y Shuri. La fábula que recoge el presagio por el que Hachiman se manifestó a Shō Toku posee elementos paradigmáticos de las leyendas japonesas tales como aves, flechas, y campanas budistas flotantes:

When King Shō Toku was on his way to an expedition of islands with a two thousand force, he went through Asato. He saw the bird cry and fly away, so he looked up at the sky and prayed 'if I can Shōot the bird down with just one arrow, please grant my wish for subjugation of the islands.' Amazingly, he Shōots the bird with just one arrow. As troops departed from Naha port in 50 boats, the temple bell adrift on the waves and never left the warship. King Shō Toku vowed 'This bell must be granted from Hachiman Bodhisattva. If we acquire the bell, we will definitely win the battle. I will venerate Hachiman when I go back.' He loads the bell into warship and head for the battle. The king achieved victory and returned. The King Shō Toku appreciated divine protection of Hachiman Bodhisattva and fulfilled his vow. He constructed Asato Hachimangu Shrine, along with Koumyouzan Shintōkuji temple and hung the bell. This is the origin of Asato Hachimangu Shrine. (Okinawa Prefecture Shrine Agency 2015: n.p.).



Figure 6 - El santuario shintoísta Asato Hachimangu en Naha, donde presuntamente cayó la flecha lanzada por el rey Shō Toku, también conocido como Hachiman-aji. Fuente: el autor 2018.

El santuario Shintō de Hachiman, dedicado también a los cultos del budismo Kumano Gongen, se construyó en el lugar en el que, según la leyenda, cayó la fecha que mató al pájaro.<sup>107</sup> Shō Toku depositó su armamento en el santuario (arco, flecha, casco y armadura) y colocó allá la campana budista que hizo sagrada aparición sobre el mar. Todos estos elementos que forman parte del culto a Hachiman y la tradición *wakō*, no solo se refieren al rey, sino que también ayudan a explicar su denostada fama en las historias oficiales posteriores (Smits 2019a: 118-120).<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Antiguamente el santuario shinto y el templo budista formaban un único emplazamiento, hoy se encuentran separados por pocos metros.

<sup>108</sup> Atendiendo a dichas circunstancias Smits contempla la posibilidad de que la invasión de Kikai fuera, al menos en parte, llevada a cabo por el anterior soberano, Shō Taikyū, y que la historia oficial la haya asignado a Shō Toku para reforzar el sentido de virtud del nuevo linaje: “if Kikai was conquered by a king who acted like a *wakō*, and Chinese-style historiography requires the last king of a dynasty to be evil, then moving the *wakō* details Taichū recorded from Shō Taikyū’s reign into Shō Toku’s reign would solve several problems. It would reinforce the evil nature of the last king while simultaneously burnishing the reputation of the previous monarch, a ruler closely linked with the Second Shō dynasty. In other words, the conquest of Kikai may have been the work, in whole or in part, of Shō Taikyū.” (Smits 2019a: 120)

Con frecuencia, la conquista de Kikai se ha descrito como poco más que la aventura juvenil de un rey admirador de los señores del mar y amante de las campañas militares, un logro de nulo o escaso interés estratégico y económico (Kerr 1958: 100-101). Tal visión entronca con la degradada imagen de Shō Toku que transmiten las historiografías oficiales de Ryūkyū. Investigaciones recientes, sin embargo, han demostrado Kikai fue un valioso centro de comercio y de técnicas artesanas del sur de Kyūshū entre los siglos X al XV, un nodo cultural que conectaba el archipiélago okinawense con Japón y Corea (Smits 2019a: 18-25). Por lo tanto, esta empresa de Shō Toku debe ser reconocida como la apropiación material y alegórica de una centralidad económica que, aunque en declive, continuaba siendo poderosa. En torno a 1440, el Reino de Ryūkyū prácticamente controlaba todo el terreno de las islas Amami-Ōshima, con excepción de Kikaijima. En sus movimientos hacia el norte, las expediciones militares Ryūkyūenses chocaban con fuerzas del clan Satsuma, quienes igualmente ambicionaban controlar la zona.<sup>109</sup> Esta frontera perduró como lugar de conflicto durante la centuria siguiente:

In 1493, a force from Satsuma invaded Amami-Ōshima and clashed with an army under Shuri's command. In a bloody battle, the Ryūkyūans drove off the Satsuma invaders. In 1537, King Shō Shin (r. 1477-1527), often credited by modern mythmakers with creating the 'peaceful kingdom' by confiscating and locking up all weapons, led an invasion force of Okinawan soldiers to quell a rebellious Amami-Ōshima. The *Kyūyō*, an official history, states that Shō Sei dispatched soldiers to Ōshima in 1538. Some accounts record King Shō Gen as leading an invasion of Amami-Ōshima in 1571, though there is some debate among historians regarding the veracity of the 1571 campaign. (Smits 2010: 8)

Precisamente para doblegar la resistencia del sur de Kyūshū en Kikai en 1466, Shō Toku había invocado la eficacia simbólica de Hachiman. El monarca de las Ryūkyū se reapropiaba así del principal capital religioso-guerrero de Japón, y adquiriría consecuentemente el significativo sagrado del *hidarigomon*, nueva bandera del reino, para erigir su autoridad y liderazgo carismático.<sup>110</sup> Muy probablemente a partir de esa época,

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<sup>109</sup> La constante situación de inestabilidad en el archipiélago Amami-Oshima y la memoria del expansionismo militar de las Ryūkyūs pueden ayudar a entender la exigua oposición a la invasión de 1609.

<sup>110</sup> Para el concepto de capital religioso y la eficacia simbólica ver Bourdieu (2006).



si no antes, el estandarte del dios japonés de la guerra comenzó a adquirir su condición primordial en el universo simbólico de Ryūkyū y sus artes marciales.<sup>111</sup>

De hecho, los análisis históricos y culturales trazan una genealogía de la llegada de Hachiman a Ryūkyū que se enraíza en períodos anteriores al santuario que Shō Toku establecería en Asato. Estas fuentes señalan que la sacerdotisa Tsukishiro (a quien hago mención en un *omoro* al inicio de este segundo capítulo, en referencia a su liderazgo de las tropas de Shō Hashi para la primera unificación del reino) es una iteración Hachiman que llegó con un grupo de inmigrantes *wakō* que alcanzaron Ryūkyū desde Higo, en Kyūshū (Smits 2019a: 45, 108-109).<sup>112</sup> Entre estos migrantes estaría Samekawa-ōnushi padre de Shō Shishō (1354-1421) rey de Chūzan, primer miembro de la dinastía Shō y padre de Shō Hashi primer rey de Ryūkyū. Samekawa es el probable inspirador o fuente de la leyenda de la llegada de Minamoto no Tametomo a Okinawa. (Smits 2019a: 153-155).

Tsukishiro no es la única permutación de Hachiman en Ryūkyū. Diversas figuras femeninas que emparentan, por su simbología facultades chamánico-guerreras, con los cultos a Hachiman hacen aparición en el *Omoro Sōshi*. Entre ellas está Aoriyae de Nakijin, quien fuera la sacerdotisa más poderosa de Okinawa antes de la reforma institucional del sistema de mujeres divinas Kikoe-ōgimi de Shō Shin, representa otro ejemplo. En los *omoro* se hace referencia a Aoriyae como la «aplata-islas», la derrocadora de comunidades y regente de viento, agua y tormentas, «often channeled divine power for military purposes. In this mode, she was a northern Okinawan version of Jingū as a manifestation of Hachiman. Aoriyae was also closely connected with the *tomoe* symbol.» (Smits 2019a: 32, 46).

Los remanentes de antiguas creencias y rituales de Ryūkyū que presentan trazas de veneración a Hachiman son numerosísimas.<sup>113</sup> Smits (2019a) ha llevado a cabo una

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<sup>111</sup> Además de los aspectos militares, los *wakō* reverenciaban los poderes talismánicos de Hachiman como gobernante de agua, vientos y tormentas. Para una posible relación entre Mazu y Hachiman véase Smits (2019a: 43).

<sup>112</sup> “The ties between Ryūkyū and Higo were extensive. Takase (present-day Tamana) on the coast of Higo was the northern terminus of a sea route to Fujian in southern China. The route ran through the Ryūkyū islands, and it became especially popular during the fourteenth century as the Hakata-Ningbō route became increasingly dangerous. Hashimoto Yū points out that the shift to the Takase-Fujian route accelerated the development of the Ryūkyū islands” (Smits 2019a: 31)

<sup>113</sup> Incluso en cánticos tradicionales de islas diminutas y distantes como Tarama, en el archipiélago sur de Ishigaki, cerca de Taiwan, aparecen repetidamente las imágenes de deidades y guerreros llegados de

investigación vasta y completísima al respecto por lo que merece la pena dirigirse a ella para profundizar en estos fenómenos. Sí queremos señalar en particular uno de sus hallazgos, baste decir que Hachiman fue fuente de inspiración para la deidad demonio-protectora de la segunda dinastía en Ryūkyū;<sup>114</sup> mas quedó sustituido por, o quizá mejor dicho transfigurado en, Benzaiten a partir del reinado de Shō Shin (r. 1477-1526). Sin duda, tras llevar a cabo la enorme tarea de pacificar y centralizar el poder en Ryūkyū, el nuevo sistema de gobernanza de Shō Shin, un programa prescriptivo de re-civilización y estabilización estructural, debía crear una nueva legitimidad,<sup>115</sup> desligada en gran medida de las bases socioculturales *wakō*-Hachiman del reino:

Wrapping the Demon Deity in the mantle of Benzaiten effectively put distance between Ryūkyū and its Hachiman/*wakō* roots. Moreover, appropriating other Hachiman-like deities such as Aoriya, linking them into the official religious network, making them subordinate to Kikoe-ōgimi/Benzaiten, and ultimately to the king, all brought potentially unruly spiritual power under firm central control. The same goes for linking the Hachiman shrine with a Buddhist temple and worshipping Hachiman as a bodhisattva. (Smits 2019a: 201).

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Yamato, portando la metalurgia y la iconografía de las tres montañas, recordemos todos ellos factores de la amalgama de creencia que dio origen a Hachiman: “Venerable blacksmith deity - Who truly was born on the island of Yamato - From three mountains of iron nuggets - He built a giant bellows and piled up a giant anvil - He built a giant hammer and a small hammer - He built giant tongs and blacksmith tools. . .” (Smits 2019a: 52).

<sup>114</sup> “Ryūkyū’s Demon Deity was associated with shamanic divination. It tended to lurk behind the scenes of official rites, appearing occasionally until the end of the kingdom. For example, *Ōshima hikki*, a 1762 Tosa account of conditions in Ryūkyū based on interviews of the crew of a disabled ship, mentions that ‘Since long ago, veneration of the Demon Deity has deep roots in Ryūkyū. Its government is based on oracles from this deity.’ Moreover, when Ryūkyū’s last king Shō Tai (r. 1848–1879) received the order to vacate Shuri castle in 1879 and saw no way that human power could save his throne, he turned to divine power as a last resort. Kishaba Chōken (1840–1916), a member of Shō Tai’s inner circle, reported that he and the king withdrew to a room and examined documents describing the origins of Ryūkyū’s shrines, presumably in order to find the most potent deity for preserving the state. The king asked Kishaba for his opinion, and he recommended the Demon Deity. When the king asked for assurance of this deity’s suitability and power, Kishaba explained that the Demon Deity had a long record of solving thorny political problems.” (Smits 2019a: 196).

<sup>115</sup> La transformación del Reino de las Ryūkyūs, aun con todo, requería de una solución de continuidad cultural. Benzaiten, diosa japonesa de la música, la elocuencia y la sabiduría, una de las siete deidades de la fortuna, pero también protectora antes los desastres naturales, es un recurso perfecto para reconfigurar el sistema de creencias previas. Incorporando elementos propios del budismo esotérico y la magia con base en el ying-yang (onmyōdo) (Smits 2019a: 198), Benzaiten emparenta con las figuras femeninas, chamánicas y guerreras que lideraban las diversas comunidades que habitaban las Ryūkyūs desde tiempos anteriores al siglo XV. En ocasiones Benzaiten también se entiende como una emanación o variante de Kannon, quien está netamente asociada a la protección de los viajeros marítimos, la herrería e incluso la forja de espadas, por lo que es una deidad de considerable ascendencia para el panteón samurái. Cabe destacar que con asiduidad la iconografía de Benzaiten la presenta con múltiples brazos, fuertemente armados, sosteniendo un arco, una flecha, una espada, un hacha, una lanza, un mazo largo, una rueda de hierro y una cuerda de seda. Algo muy similar sucede con la Kannon de los mil brazos.

Al igual que sucedió en Japón, el sincretismo religioso también se dio en Okinawa. Los procesos de absorción de creencias y rituales foráneos al folklore local llegados a través de migraciones y contactos culturales, hicieron que el culto a Hachiman fuera sincrético. Y este fue el que se replicó en Ryūkyū, como bien argumenta Smits. La emergencia de Hachiman en Japón articula diversas creencias y se forma por agregación, encontrando multiplicidad de expresiones culturales y rituales atraídas por las características de su figura. Estos podían ser oraculares, marciales, o de control de elementos naturales tales como el agua, los vientos y las tormentas; categorías todas ellas, por cierto, interrelacionadas en las cosmovisiones religiosas y guerreras japonesas y Ryūkyūenses. Cabe recordar que en estos tempranos períodos medievales no estamos aún ante etapas de imposición de una religión estatal, sino de cooptación y adaptación, frecuentemente con orientaciones budistas o de mitos y costumbres populares que más tarde se codificarían también como cultura propia de élites sociales y literarias. Ese rico sustrato también permite entender, no solo la variabilidad, sino una elasticidad adaptativa de prácticas rituales y referentes culturales que encuentran en las Ryūkyū un ámbito de expresión particular, pero a la vez necesaria e íntimamente relacionada con otras geografías del este de Asia.

Desde las posiciones más escépticas bien podría aducirse que el análisis simbólico-religioso de Hachiman y la cultura *bushi* en Ryūkyū ofrece un conjunto de pruebas en muchas ocasiones indirectas o circunstanciales; de interpretaciones tan amplias como permutables. Es por ello por lo que, para sumar evidencias concretas y tangibles, procederemos con un nuevo giro a la arqueología y sus evidencias físicas, complementado con documentación histórica explícita al respecto de la materia. En 1957 Kajun Higaonna, uno de los padres de los estudios okinawenses, publicó por primera vez en su libro *Ryūkyū no Rekishi* («Historia de Ryūkyū») <sup>116</sup> fotos de materiales encontrados en la «Tumba de los 100 Aji», situada en el Nakijin *gusuku*. Recordemos que Nakijin era un importante centro de poder en el norte de la isla principal de Okinawa que tenía por suma sacerdotisa-guerrera a Aoriyae, trasmutación de Hachiman, como dijimos anteriormente. <sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Higaonna Kanjun (1957). *Ryūkyū no Rekishi* [Historia de las Ryūkyūs]. Shibundō, Tōkyō 1957.

<sup>117</sup> El historiador de karate Andreas Quast, cuyo trabajo es de una profesionalidad y abundancia enorme, en 2013 presentó a la comunidad karateka en su blog esa misma foto. Como bien recuerda Quast el hecho

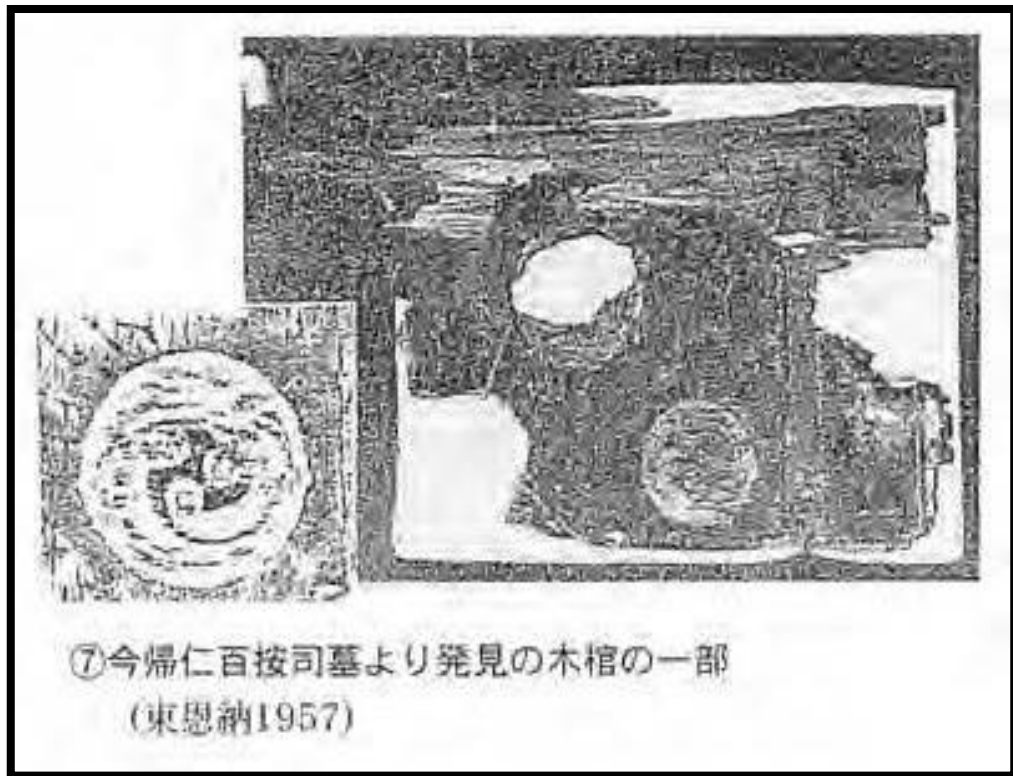


Figure 7 - Escudo de armas encontrado en el mausoleo de los 100 Aji, grabado en un cofre de madera. Nótese que las comas del tomoe muestran en su interior pequeñas circunferencias al modo de las magatama y el símbolo ying-yang. Fuente: Informe sobre la propiedad cultural de Nakijin Vol. 18: reporte de reparación de la tumba de madera de los 100 Aji, 2011: 20.

Aunque en la reproducción no puede apreciarse, el *hidari gomon* presenta aquí un acabado en dorado, color áureo y solar asociado a la simbología de Hachiman, que denota por igual su signo en forma de dos palomas doradas. Esta última imagen es extremadamente habitual en templos japoneses dedicados al dios de la guerra, y conecta con la leyenda de Hachiman según el *Usa Engi* (844), según he expuesto en páginas anteriores. La tumba de los 100 Aji (*Momojana haka*) está hoy catalogada por Japón como «Propiedad Cultural Municipal en Okinawa». Contiene los restos de los señores feudales fieles al último rey de la primera dinastía Shō, Shō Toku, conquistador de Kikai y constructor del Asato *Hachimangu*.

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de que las Ryūkyūs estuvieran inmersas en guerras intestinas y conquistas exteriores resta popularidad al hallazgo: “maybe the story is not popular as it reminds people of the military state of affairs of Ryūkyū at the time, something that became very unpopular in the second half of the 20th century.” (Quast 2013: n.p). Añado que la referencia a un símbolo tan genuinamente japonés como Hachiman tampoco favorece su aceptación entre los círculos del karate de Okinawa.

Por otra parte, el hallazgo en 1991 de restos de una armadura japonesa en cueva cercana a Tamagusuku, parte sureste de Okinawa. A pesar del paso del tiempo y sus notables efectos, la pieza metálica de la sección pectoral, datada en los primeros años del Muromachi *bakufu* (1336-1573), mantenía aún visible el crisantemo imperial. De acuerdo con Smits parece evidente que estamos ante una prueba material de la llegada de guerreros japoneses a Ryūkyū, cantada incontables veces en los *omoro*: «the armor probably came to Okinawa with Southern Court remnants, quite possibly with Shō Hashi's family. » (Smits 2019a: 53). Recordemos que Shō Hashi, escoltado por la poderosa sacerdotisa y avatar de Hachiman, Tsukishiro; es el fundador del Reino de Ryūkyū y monarca inaugural de la primera dinastía Shō. Él fue, además, quien dio inicio a las relaciones tributarias con la corte Muromachi:

Starting with Shō Hashi, Ryūkyūan kings maintained cordial relations with the Ashikaga Shōguns. In correspondence, the Shōguns addressed the kings in Shuri as «lords of Ryūkyū» (*Ryūkyūkoku yononushi*), and Ryūkyūan kings usually dispatched a trade ship to the *bakufu* each year. (Smits 2019a: 74)

Por último, no queremos dejar de enfatizar la existencia de varias fuentes textuales de la época que señalan las similitudes entre los armamentos japoneses y Ryūkyūenses. Por citar un par de ejemplos,<sup>118</sup> tanto las crónicas de Ryang (un náufrago coreano que residió primero en Naha y posteriormente en Shuri en la época del rey Shō Taikyū [1415-1460]), como las de los emisarios de Ryūkyū en Corea recogidas en los *Joseon wangjo sillok* («Crónicas auténticas de Joseon») coinciden al identificar el armamento de los soldados en Shuri como semejante al japonés:

Soldiers resided nearby, and during morning assemblies or criminal trials they wore full suits of armor. Based on Ryang's description, this armor came from Japan. Ryūkyūan envoys to Korea in 1462 also described their country's military equipment as being similar to that of Japan. (Smits 2019a: 94).

### 2.2.3. El *hidari gomon* y el *kobudō* de Okinawa en el siglo XX

El siglo XX es un momento de máxima importancia para el *kobudō* de Okinawa por dos motivos. Primero, porque en la primera mitad de la centuria emerge un gran interés por

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<sup>118</sup> Kerr (1958: 96), aunque sin citar sus fuentes, afirma: “There is reason to believe that in Hashi's days the princes, the anji, and tehir chief retainers each wore two swords at the side, in the Japanese manner”.

los métodos armados en Okinawa, llevándose a cabo una enorme tarea de recuperación y catalogación. Segundo, porque este proceso se acompaña de los primeros de documentos gráficos y fotografías que ofrecen testimonio de un mundo simbólico claramente dominado por el *hidari gomon*. Por lo tanto, merece la pena prestar atención a los emblemas e imágenes que identifican a los principales maestros de karate encargados de restaurar el *kobudō* de Okinawa.

Empecemos por la escuela de la familia Matayoshi. A pesar de la más que posible concurrencia de elementos mistificadores y de dataciones dispares, Matayoshi Shinkō (1888-1947) protagoniza una biografía absolutamente fascinante (Bishop 1996; Guarelli 2016; Juster, 2016; McCarthy 2016). Para las finalidades de esta investigación baste resumir un par de cuestiones. La biografía marcial de Shinkō nacido y criado en Okinawa, pasa por una etapa prácticamente desconocida en Hokkaido que da inicio en 1905, para posteriormente llegar a Manchuria alrededor de 1911, donde se une a un grupo de nómadas y/o bandidos. En torno a 1915 se le sitúa nuevamente en Japón ofreciendo una exhibición en el Festival Memorial Imperial de Demostración de Budō en el Santuario Meiji de Tokio.

De vuelta a Okinawa, Shinkō muestra sus habilidades al Príncipe Hirohito su durante visita oficial en 1921. Posteriormente viaja por segunda vez a China, Shanghái y Fujian,<sup>119</sup> donde continúa aprendiendo hasta 1935, año en que se establece definitivamente en Naha. A partir de ese momento se dedicará mayormente a la medicina tradicional china usando la acupuntura y la herbolaria.<sup>120</sup> Su hijo Matayoshi Shinpō (1921-1997) continuaría a hombros de su padre, convirtiéndose en una personalidad capital del *kobudō* del siglo XX, fundando la *Zen Okinawa Kobudō Renmei* en 1972, y siendo nombrado representante para Okinawa de la *Dai Nippon Butokukai* en 1987. El emblema de la escuela Matayoshi, aun con la consabida influencia de técnicas y armas chinas, es una combinación del *hidari gomon* y el crisantemo imperial japonés.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> De este segundo viaje Shinkō llevó consigo a Okinawa un pergamino de la deidad marcial Marshal Tian, de la que hablamos al final de este segundo capítulo.

<sup>120</sup> Dependiendo de la fuente, las fechas de sus estancias en China varían, pero la línea temporal y los hechos son básicamente los mismos.

<sup>121</sup> Aunque por el momento no he podido corroborar los datos, algunas fuentes aducen que Shinko vio premiada su espectacular habilidad con el honor de poder incorporar la flor imperial al símbolo de su estilo. De este modo el emblema se lee como la unión de las casas dinásticas y la cultura de Japón y Okinawa: “Matayoshi Sensei is the only Okinawan martial artist honored by the Emperor of Japan to

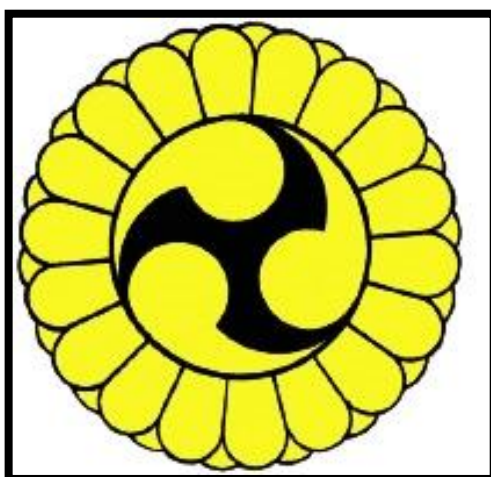


Figure 8 - El emblema de la escuela Matayoshi: una combinación del hidari gomon y el crisantemo imperial japonés.

Junto a la familia Matayoshi, el responsable del mayor esfuerzo de revitalización del *kobudō* de Okinawa en el siglo pasado fue Taira Shinken (1898–1970).<sup>122</sup> Nacido en la isla de Kume, Shinken fue dado en adopción, pero se dice que era descendiente de una familia de bajo rango de la nobleza local. Tras acabar los estudios de primaria, trabajó en las minas de fosfatos de la pequeña isla de Kitadaito, al sureste de la isla principal de Okinawa, para ayudar a la economía familiar. De esa experiencia laboral, sufrió un accidente que le dejaría una visible cojera (Faurillon 2017; McCarthy 1999). Taira inició sus estudios de karate tras emigrar a Tokyo alrededor del año 1922, donde más tarde encontraría a Funakoshi Gichin, conocido como padre del karate moderno:

like other *Uchinanchu* (Okinawan's) whom had recently ventured up to the capital city, Taira found adequate lodging at the *Meisei juku* (the *Okinawan* student's dormitory), in *Koishikawa's Suidobashi*. And, it was also where he first met fellow countryman *Funakoshi Gichin*. (McCarthy 1999: 104).

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use the Imperial Flower as a symbol of his organization. The inside of the logo contains the symbol Mitsu Domoe that represents the Imperial Okinawan Shō dynasty crest. With this, the Matayoshi Kobudo logo represents the blend of the Japanese and Okinawan cultures.” (*Zen Okinawan Kobudō - The Matayoshi Kobudō Patch* 2015: n.p.)

<sup>122</sup> Aunque su nombre oficial era Shinken Maezato se hizo llamar ‘Taira’ conservando el apellido de soltera de su madre, siendo éste uno de los patronímicos más habituales en Okinawa. A este respecto Sakamaki (1964: 119, n.17) nos provee con una extensísima lista de los apellidos Ryūkyūenses que hacen uso del kanji “Taira”.



*Figure 9 – Taira Shiken, equipado con armas de kobudō. Tal y como se observa el hidari hidari gommon adorna su escudo, lo que demuestra la presencia del emblema de Hachiman en el imaginario del karate*

En 1929, Taira empezaría su instrucción formal en *kobudō* con el maestro Moden Yabiku (1878–1941). Moden, también emigrante okinawense,<sup>123</sup> era el maestro de *kobudō* con mayor prestigio en la isla principal de Japón y durante los años treinta, enseñó, entre otros lugares, en el departamento de la policía metropolitana de Tokio. El maestro aprendería asimismo de Mabuni Kenwa (fundador de la escuela *Shitō-ryū* y descendiente lejano de Uni-Ufugusuku) a partir de 1934. En 1940 Taira regresó a Okinawa para llevar a cabo un ingente trabajo de compilación de técnicas, armas y tradiciones en territorio okinawense. Su dedicación cristalizó en un sistema de 42 katas y en la fundación de la *Ryūkyū Kobudō Hozon Shinkokai* («Sociedad para la preservación y promoción del Kobudō de las Ryūkyū») en 1955. Asimismo, Taira publicó, pagando todos los gastos, el

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<sup>123</sup> Ya en 1925 el propio Yabiku había fundado en Okinawa la *Ryūkyū Kobujutsu Kenkyukai* (Sociedad para la Investigación de las Artes Marciales de Okinawa).



primer texto introductorio al *kobudō* de Okinawa en edición limitada para los instructores a su cargo, la *Ryūkyū Kobudō Taikan* («Enciclopedia del Kobudō de las Ryūkyū») en 1964.

El papel de Taira Shinken para la popularización y preservación de las artes marciales de Okinawa es difícilmente conmensurable. Taira formó a Demura Fumio (1938), reconocido maestro de karate y *kobudō* a nivel mundial, quién emigraría a los Estados Unidos en 1965, y terminaría por ser instructor de *nunchaku* de Bruce Lee,<sup>124</sup> y doble de acción de Pat Morita (1932-2005) en la famosísima saga fílmica *The Karate Kid* (1984).<sup>125</sup> La enorme tarea de Taira Shinken atrajo el interés del ejército de los Estados Unidos en Okinawa, que solicitó numerosas demostraciones en sus escuelas militares; de tal suerte que el legado cultural del maestro, en forma de fotografías y manuales, forma hoy parte del Instituto Smithsonian.<sup>126</sup> Cómo no, Taira manejaba abundantemente el *hidari-gomon* para caracterizar sus armas y su arte.<sup>127</sup>

Evidentemente no se debe asumir que los maestros del *kobudō* de Okinawa del siglo XX identificaban el *hidari gomon* con Hachiman o las tradiciones marciales japonesas, sino seguramente con el Reino de Ryūkyū y, por ende, con sus tradiciones marciales, más allá de que pudieran ser conocedores de los detalles de tal continuidad cultural. Es muy lógico pensar, por otra parte, que sí debieron ser, en algún momento,

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<sup>124</sup> Los *nunchaku* son una de las armas más famosas de las artes marciales, célebres en gran medida gracias a Bruce Lee. Están compuestas por dos palos de madera cortos unidos por una pieza de cuerda o cadena.

<sup>125</sup> Existe un documental bastante interesante al respecto titulado *The Real Miyagi* (2005). Curiosamente el metraje ofrece imágenes de Demura Fumio en dependencias de la Generalitat de Catalunya, muy probablemente la Federació Catalana de Karate.

<sup>126</sup> “Notice of the exhibitions aired on FEN (Far East Network) radio and were covered by the Morning Star newspaper. Arousing considerable interest General Lambert's high commission described the tradition as ‘a valuable piece of cultural heritage.’ The commission further concluded that through a deeper understanding of these fascinating ethnic traditions their two countries and cultures might be brought that much closer together. Hence, *Taira Shinken* was petitioned to introduce his research directly to the United States, and also did so. Introducing fifteen different kinds of weapons, together with directions and complete set of photographs illustrating their use and application, *Taira Shinken* succeeded in launching a new era for the weapon disciplines. His contribution was acknowledged and placed safely within the venerable walls of the Smithsonian Institute.” (McCarthy 1999: 109-110).

<sup>127</sup> McCarthy se refiere a la obra de Shinken como una empresa de recuperación de artes “plebeyas” (McCarthy 1999: 107). El mismo Taira reconoce: “At one point kobudo was so popular that it was even cultivated in the mountain areas, where it remains a folk tradition in the form of dances that use a bo. However, the rapidly expanding influence of the Western culture has changed feudal society, and self-protection with weapons is no longer a necessity. In this light kobudo became an obsolete discipline. Hence, kobudo study has declined to the point where very few people understand its practice.” (McCarthy 1999: 9). De hecho, gran parte del conocimiento hoy acumulado en Okinawa en torno al *kobudō*, resulta de una suerte de ingeniería inversa de investigación, colecta y desarrollo de esas tradiciones rurales y comunitarias, conducida por personalidades como Shinken Taira.

relativamente conscientes de ello; pues teniendo en cuenta que muchos viajaban o emigraban a Japón, resultaba prácticamente imposible no toparse con el emblema de Hachiman.

#### **2.2.4. Conclusión: dos casos de representatividad de símbolos nacionales y marciales**

En la conclusión de este capítulo, me gustaría señalar una última confluencia que viene a corroborar la conveniencia de aplicar métodos de la geografía cultural al karate de Okinawa, aportando nuevos y relevantes hallazgos. Como he mencionado es de general conocimiento que a Funakoshi Gichin se le reconoce ampliamente como padre del karate moderno, y también, en ocasiones, del karate japonés, habiendo fungido como presidente honorífico de la Asociación del Karate Japonés desde su fundación en 1949. Hoy en día, el estilo Shōtōkan ha perdido casi por completo la praxis del *kobudō*, pero se sabe que el maestro, sobre todo en el período de preguerra, cultivó intensamente la disciplina. Funakoshi nació, se educó y formó en Okinawa, migrando a Japón en 1922, donde comenzó a ofrecer clases en el dormitorio de estudiantes okinawenses conocido como *Meiseijuku*. Funakoshi practicaría el Zen bajo la dirección del monje supremo del Templo *Enkakuji* en Kamakura, y desarrollaría varios escritos en los que justificaba la afinidad entre los preceptos del karate de Okinawa y las tradiciones del bushido. Al igual que sucede con el *Shitō-ryū* de Mabuni Kenwa, el Shōtōkan de Funakoshi está recogido como un estilo tradicional de karate en Japón, pero no en Okinawa. El «shōtō» de Shōtōkan proviene del nombre de pila con que Funakoshi firmaba sus caligrafías y escritos poético-filosóficos. Shōtō se traduce como «las olas de los pinos»,<sup>128</sup> e implica una analogía con el sonido de las olas del mar (*Okinawa, the Birthplace* 2017: 190; Japan Karate Association 2005: n.p.), mientras que «kan» significa «casa» o «edificio».<sup>129</sup> El propio Funakoshi explica en su autobiografía el porqué de su nombre artístico:

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<sup>128</sup> EL diccionario en línea *Jisho* ofrece literalmente la siguiente traducción: “sonido del viento que cruje en las agujas de los pinos (como las olas)”.

<sup>129</sup> Funakoshi no escogió explícitamente este nombre, sino que sus estudiantes colocaron un cartel con la escritura “Shōtōkan” a la entrada de su dojo en 1939. El edificio fue destruido por los bombardeos del ejército de los Estados Unidos en 1945. La destrucción de la cultura material del karate persiguió a los maestros okinawenses más allá de las Ryūkyūs.

I am often asked how I happened to choose the pen name of Shōtō, which became the name of the new dōjō. The word *shōtō* in Japanese means literally ‘pine waves’ and so has no great arcane significance, but I should like to tell why I selected it. My native castle town of Shuri is surrounded by hills with forests of Ryūkyū pines and subtropical vegetation [...] I used to walk along Mount Torao, sometimes at night when the moon was full or when the sky was so clear that one stood under a canopy of stars. At such times, if there also happened to be a bit of wind, one could hear the rustle of the pines and feel the deep, impenetrable mystery that lies at the root of all life. To me the murmur was a kind of celestial music. Poets all over the world have sung their songs about the brooding mystery that lies within woods and forests, and I was attracted to the bewitching solitude of which they are a symbol. [...] Then, when I was in my twenties and working as a schoolteacher in Naha, I would frequently go to a long, narrow island in the bay that boasted a splendid natural park called Okunoyama, with glorious pine trees and a large lotus pond. The only building on the island was a Zen temple. Here too I used to come frequently to walk alone among the trees. By that time I had been practicing karate for some years, and as I became more familiar with the art I became more conscious of its spiritual nature. To enjoy my solitude while listening to the wind whistling through the pines was, it seemed to me, an excellent way to achieve the peace of mind that karate demands. And since this had been part of my way of life from earliest childhood, I decided that there was no better name than Shōtō with which to sign the poems that I wrote. (Funakoshi 1981:85-85).<sup>130</sup>

Dos son los lugares pues que Funakoshi asocia al viento en los pinos y su apodo Shōtō: el bosque en el monte Torao, hoy parte de la lista de lugares y monumentos históricos elaborados por la Prefectura de Okinawa (Okinawa Karate Information Center 2017: n.p.); y la arboleda del parque Okayama, emplazamiento del Okinawa Budōkan, cerca del santuario Oki-no-gū donde, en 2007 y bajo financiación privada, se erigió un monumento a Funakoshi denominado «Karate ni sente nashi» honorando la famosa máxima del maestro.<sup>131</sup> El encaje de estas dos arquitecturas naturales, así como de la figura de Funakoshi y los posibles referentes espirituales y simbólicos del karate, revelan el juego de finos equilibrios que comanda el proceso de patrimonialización del arte marcial de Okinawa.

La significación que da Funakoshi respecto al concepto «shōtō», aunque él mismo declare que no posee «una significación arcana especial», resulta extremadamente

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<sup>130</sup> El Monte Torao es en ocasiones visto como fuente de inspiración para el Tigre Banco que simboliza el *Shōtōkan*: “Mount Torao, which belonged to Baron Chosuke Ie (who, as a matter of fact, became one of my first patrons in Tokyo). The word *torao* means ‘tiger tail’ and was particularly appropriate because the mountain was very narrow and so heavily wooded that it actually resembled a tiger’s tail when seen from afar.” (Funakoshi 1981:85-85).

<sup>131</sup> Según el libro *Okinawa, the Birthplace*, Funakoshi aprendió el motto *karate ni sente nashi* de su maestro Asato Ankō 1827-1906 (p.85), por cierto, ávido practicante de *jigen-ryu kenjutsu*.

sugerente; pues una de las imágenes clásicamente asociadas a Hachiman es precisamente esa, la del «sonido del viento en los pinos». Según Bender tal acepción informa de los orígenes animistas del culto (Bender 1978: 167).<sup>132</sup> La primera referencia escrita de la materialización/alegoría de Hachiman como el «sonido del viento en los pinos», son unos versos de Zeami (1363-1443) pertenecientes a la pieza de teatro Nō *Yumi Yawata* («El arco de Hachiman»):

Even the sound of the wind in the pines,/ All are manifestations,/ Of the body of the god,/ We rely on the deity's will,/ Manifested as a god./The Great Bodhisattva Hachiman,/ How profound are his revelations,/ How profound are his revelations.  
(Bender 1978: 177-178).

Conociera Funakoshi o no esta alusión en la obra de Zeami,<sup>133</sup> nótese que el maestro de karate nos habla de «escuchar el crujido de los pinos y sentir el profundo e impenetrable misterio que yace en la raíz de toda la vida», un bisbiseo de «música celestial», un melancólico misterio escondido en el bosque, cantado «por poetas de todo el mundo». Todo ello a Funakoshi le evoca una metáfora perfecta de la experiencia trascendental y la naturaleza espiritual que él pudo descubrir en la praxis del karate, una figuración en aras de «lograr la paz mental que el karate demanda». Deliberadamente, o por simple semiótica interiorizada a partir de su entorno cultural, Funakoshi está conjugando aquí signos y sentidos que pertenecen indudablemente a la cultura *bushi* japonesa y a una forma de representar el mundo. Restaría por elucidar si dicha aculturación denota la transición general del Reino de Ryūkyū para convertirse en una prefectura japonesa (1879), la «japonización» de Okinawa como equivalente a la

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<sup>132</sup> Recordemos además la equivalencia entre el sonido de los pinos y el de las olas, así como la conexión de Hachiman con el control de vientos y aguas, la navegación, las migraciones por zonas costeras que demarcan la extensión de sus templos y las batallas navales ya sea a favor de fuerzas japonesas, Ryūkyūenses o *wakō*.

<sup>133</sup> Es francamente probable que Funakoshi, maestro de escuela que poseía amplia formación, conociera la obra de Zeami. Su padre es descrito como miembro de una clase media-alta (pekumi), bienestante y conservador, erudito confuciano, notable cantante y danzante, aunque adicto a la bebida, lo que empobreció a la familia (*Okinawa, the Birthplace* 2017:83,189). Sabemos también que Funakoshi participaba con frecuencia de actividades culturales y académicas, como por ejemplo una reunión del *Nanto Danwa Kai* (“Grupo de discusión sobre las islas del sur”) fundado por Yanagita Kunio, quien se llamaba a sí mismo “padre de los estudios de folklore japonés”, en 1922. El historiador de karate Andreas Quast ofrece en su página web una foto en la que puede verse a Funakoshi junto a Yanagita, Iha Fuyu, figura líder en los estudios sobre Okinawa, y Nakasone Genwa karateka, editor de libros sobre la disciplina e influyente político de posguerra, entre otras personalidades (Quast 2017: n.p.). Quast sitúa la reunión en 1927, por lo que debió tener lugar en Japón, ya que Yanagita visitó las Ryūkyūs en 1921 y 1923. Por otra parte, es provechoso subrayar que Iha compró a Funakoshi una colección de figuras de teatro de marionetas, disciplina cultivada en Okinawa al igual que en Japón y China (Quast 2012: n.p.).

«japonización» del karate. Si hubiera de inclinarme por una solución, optaría por buscar una continuidad que no germine en apenas cinco décadas, sino que se retrotraiga varios siglos atrás.

Otra pregunta que, engarzando con la anterior, sin duda asaltarán al investigador es ¿por qué motivo el Reino de Ryūkyū mantuvo el emblema de Hachiman como su bandera?; y ¿en qué términos actúa esto como dispositivo de orgullo nacional y cultural? El *hidari gomon* sobrevivió al establecimiento de la segunda dinastía Shō a finales del siglo XV, con su deslinde del pasado *wakō* y la defenestración del rey Shō Toku, *Hachiman no aji*, para la historiografía oficial. La conquista de Satsuma y el avasallamiento forzoso partir de 1609 por el Japón Tokugawa tampoco impulsó un cambio de enseña nacional. Ello indica que el *hidari gomon*, más allá de su contexto político, albergaba un significado cultural arraigado y profundo, apelando al imaginario de los habitantes del Reino de Ryūkyū de manera inefable. Por lo que respecta a la etapa post 1609 del símbolo de Hachiman, Joseph Kreiner, una autoridad en los estudios sobre Okinawa, en un interesantísimo capítulo titulado «Some Thoughts on the Idea of Kinship and the Origins of the Ryūkyūan Kingdom», plantea una teoría a contracorriente sobre la leyenda de Minamoto no Tametomo que puede ser aplicada al *hidari gomon*:

It was felt that the kingdom needed a strengthening of its identity. The Minamoto is a family of imperial origin, tracing themselves back to Seiwa Tennō (reigned 858-876). The Minamoto clan is also the only family, in which the Shōgunate was heritable. The mentioning of this tradition in the *Chūzan Seikan* means, that the reigning Shō-family is connected by Shunten with the Japanese emperors as well as the ruling Tokugawa Shōguns, and is elevated over its conquerors, the Shimazu family of Satsuma, who are mere vassals of the Shōgun dynasty of the Minamoto. (Kreiner 2008: 391)

Recordemos que la popularización e inmensa fama de Hachiman a partir del siglo VII conlleva que la casa imperial lo interprete como una manifestación del mítico Emperador Ojin. A su vez, alrededor del siglo XII el clan Minamoto lo establece como su *ujigami* («kami protector») y lo inscribe preeminentemente en la cultura *bushi*. En otras palabras, al igual que ocurre con la leyenda de Minamoto no Tametomo, tanto Hachiman como el *hidari gomon* se convierten en fuente de orgullo y de resistencia político-cultural frente al clan Satsuma, pero no por antagonismo con el núcleo de la nación japonesa, sino por vinculación con ella. A estas consideraciones podemos añadir una capa adicional, creada y narrada *ex profeso* a través del karate como artefacto político

si recuperamos el perfil de Jana Ueekata/Tei-Dō: una comunidad (o diferentes comunidades) puede (re)asignar nuevos significados a símbolos preexistentes, pero la operación de metamorfosis semántica del signo necesariamente requerirá de un encadenamiento metarreferencial dentro del orden simbólico. El *hidari gomon* de Hachiman sintetiza de manera singular múltiples vectores dialécticos –históricos, culturales, políticos, marciales– de los encuentros y desencuentros entre Okinawa y Japón, como integrantes de una geografía cultural compartida.

A través de esta investigación sobre las conexiones entre Hachiman y el karate hemos podido comprobar la polisemia del arte marcial de Okinawa. Asimismo, he repasado parte de la enorme cantidad de referencias y meta-referencias culturales que en él pueden hallarse, corroborando continuidades que forman una realidad de múltiples capas. En este sentido, respecto a las genealogías culturales del karate, resulta especialmente revelador acudir al fenómeno religioso. En las próximas páginas, pues, dirigiremos nuestra atención a Fujian, y la gran influencia de su tradición religiosa sobre la historia cultural de las artes marciales de Okinawa.

### **2.3. From China: Fujianese Deities, Taoist Esoterism, and Karate Cultural History**

As it has been demonstrated up to the moment, the Ryūkyū Kingdom, being an excellent location for facilitating international trade, was also situated a center of cross-border flows of knowledges and cultural expressions comprising religious, philosophical and martial ones. This section addresses the transcultural transmission of deities and martial worldviews between the Southeast coast of China, specifically the Fujian Region, and the Ryūkyūs, in the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. During these centuries Taoism and Taoist deities arrived at present-day Okinawa via the East Asian maritime trade network (Noritada 1996: 186-187), thanks to the settlement of migrant communities and their commercial activities and produced a significant cultural impact in the Ryūkyūs and its martial arts.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Preliminary findings on this topic were presented in the 2019 *Western Conference of the Association for Asian Studies (WCAAS)* celebrated at El Colegio de México (COLMEX). The paper was entitled:

Fujianese settlers in Okinawa, as other seamen and migrants, gave capital importance to the manipulation of supernatural forces and magical talismans, and in their maritime migration carried with them various Taoist deities. Thus, along with artisan and trading skills the Chinese community in the Ryūkyūs introduced Taoist religious beliefs, conspicuously expressed in the construction of several shrines in the Naha port zone since the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century: the *Uetenpigu* and the *Shitatenpigu*, were dedicated to Mazu (or *Tenpi* the “Heavenly Concubine”) – who had another temple in Kumejima, an island in front of Naha-,<sup>135</sup> the Kanteibyō to Guan Di, the god of war, business and commerce, the Ryuobyō to Longwang (The Dragon King), governor of water and weather, and the Tensonbyō to Taiyi Tianzun, “Heavenly Venerable Supreme Unity” (supreme Taoist god of lightning and protector of all-beings from evil, in Japanese *Rasei Fuka Tenson*) (Nikaido 2015: 220-221).<sup>136</sup> Today this Chinese deities shrines ecosystem appears in the list of the karate “historical sites and monuments” elaborated by The Okinawa Karate Information Center (OKIC) an official agency of the Okinawan Prefectural Government created in 2017.<sup>137</sup>

The arrangement of those religious facilities indicates how Mazu was the most important deity in satisfying the spiritual corpus of the whole Chinese community. Eventually, the construction of temples and the preeminence of Mazu also responded to the patronage of elite families, with their socioreligious need to signify their long-lasting covenant as merchants monopolizing a big part of the Sino-Ryūkyūan commerce (Schottenhammer 2010: 590). Since its founding in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Mazu shrine served as the education elite center in Kume (recall that Jana Uekata is said to have managed a scholarly corner at the Tenpi-gū). This situation lasted even for some time after the construction of the Shiseibyō (Confucius temple) in 1674 and Merindo

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“Fujianese Rites and Okinawan Masters: The Arrival of Martial Deities to the Ryūkyūs through the East Asian Maritime Frontier.”

<sup>135</sup> By contrast the Confucian Temple was not built until 1675 and the Confucian Academy (*Meirindo*) until 1718. The importance of Mazu worship in the Ryūkyūs is not only observable by the number of temples dedicated to her in the main harboring zone, but also in the fact that her shrines were designated as -gū “palaces” (usually multistructure complexes) in opposition to -byō regular shrines or temples (Song, Ikeda 2008: 60).

<sup>136</sup> Originally each one of these deities had its separated worshipping place (Song, Ikeda 2008: 60). Now they are all consecrated in the Tenson-byō, with Taiyi Tianzun at the center, Guan Di to his right, and Ryūjin to the left.

<sup>137</sup> They appear listed as “Kume Shiseibyō”. The old temples were obliterated by WWII and rebuilt and relocated in a unified space. The main site is the Confucian temple, accompanied by the Tenpi-gū and the Tenson-byō (Okinawa Karate Information Center 2017: n.p.).

(Confucian School) in 1718. The Chinese religious buildings of Kume became hence repositories of important historical documents and relevant books like the *Reikidai Hoan*. Diverse oral records situate a copy the legendary martial arts manual *Bubishi* (“treatise on military preparation”), a touchstone of modern karate, together with the *Reikidai Hoan* at the Tensonbyō around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Quast 2016: 81, 97).<sup>138</sup> The *Bubishi* is the most influential sourcebook of Okinawan karate, where Marshal Tian, “patron saint of karate”, is introduced.

For the development of this thesis, and mirroring the exploration of Hachiman, the most notorious Chinese god of War, Guan Di, might, at first sight, appear as the most appropriate choice to conduct an analysis. I have mentioned that Guan Di reached the Ryūkyūs and a shrine was built in his honor. The Chinese God of War also participated among the large arrange of deities, flags, and magical talismans that protected the Ryūkyūan ships.<sup>139</sup> Some martial artists of the Ryūkyūs past as Makabe Choken (1769-1825) (Hokama 2015: 56),<sup>140</sup> or Sadoyama (late 18<sup>th</sup> century) (Quast 2017a: 5),<sup>141</sup> were nicknamed “Guan Yu”, informing Guan Di appeal to the Ryūkyūan martial imagery. The spread of Guan Di worshipping among the Ryūkyūan gentry was a late custom from the 18<sup>th</sup> (Haring 1969: 136) closely associated with the god position as a patron of wealth and literature. Compared with Mazu, however, Guan Di occupied a secondary place in the Ryūkyūs culture, especially for the Kingdom’s ties to Fujian and the Chinese Empire. Guan Di, deified form of Guan Yu (162-220 A.D.) a hero from the Three Kingdoms Period born in Shanxi region, is a northern and inland deity, extremely relevant for the Chinese pantheon, but with lesser ascendance in the Fujianese one, unlike Mazu, who

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<sup>138</sup> Other oral sources assert that it was on the Confucius temple and not at the Tenson-byō. Either way it is almost sure that was kept at one of the religious sites bookshelves.

<sup>139</sup> Flags included the *hidari gomon* and the *hinomaru*. At the back of the boat, next to Mazu’s altar enshrining a statue of the goddess, one flag for Guan Di was placed: “A Bōsahata, a religious banner, flew near the location of the Bōsa’s shrine at the stern of the ship. Alongside it flew a flag for Kanteiō [Ch. Guān dì wáng]. The Ryūkyū Kingdom took Kantei as its guardian demon.” (Akamine 2016: 110).

<sup>140</sup> Again, the oral history conveys messages of the Ryūkyūs semiosphere, but the exactitude of the information is difficult to corroborate. For Hokama Makabe was “The Guan Yu of Ryūkyū, expert in front flying kick” and Makabe-Chan meant “cock”; Nagamine, who gives lots of information on Makabe life and accomplishments, makes no reference to Guan Yu, but nicknames the martial artists as “Tobitori” (“The flying bird”) in reference to his leg power. (Nagamine 2000: 2-10). Motobu monikers Makabe as “The rooster” (Quast 2013: 4-5).

<sup>141</sup> “‘Guan Yu’ Sadoyama, as his name implies, was the owner of a beautiful beard. He was said to have resembled Guan Yu of old China, who indeed looked like Sadoyama. He is said to have been skilled in *karate* and in addition to have been a master of the *yari* (spear).” (Quast 2017: 5). *Yari* is the primary weapon of Guan Di.



commands the Southern Chinese seagoing beliefs, also encompassing naval warfare. On the other hand, Marshal Tian, Fujianese God of Theater, and not Guan Di, is the deity who captured the mind of modern karate masters.<sup>142</sup>

Therefore, I will focus on these two Fujianese deities. First, I will introduce some remarks about the Mazu, an outstanding celestial being of the Chinese religion, because her worship, besides occupying the center of the ritual diplomacy for the reception of Imperial envoys at the Ryūkyūs, sheds light about the worldviews of voyagers, sailors, and soldiers covering the Fuzhou-Naha route. Secondly, I will discuss at length, Marshal Tian, a minor deity that has been evolving since the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the prominent god of karate. Before that, however, I am going to lay on a short overview of Taoism in the Ryūkyūs.

### 2.3.1. Taoism in The Ryūkyūs

In chapter one we have seen how at least since the 14<sup>th</sup> century families from Fujian dedicated to maritime activities settled in the Ryūkyūs, some of them creating an enclosed village named Kumemura, that nonetheless at the 17<sup>th</sup> century had lost its human and spatial exclusiveness by mingling with nearby areas (Uezato 2008: 62). Kumemura irradiated Taoist and *fengshui* beliefs into the Ryūkyūs (Chen, Nakama 2012: 24-25) due to its protecting qualities “against the mischief of evil spirits” (Akamine 2016: 91). Over the decades, the urban ampliation of Kumemura followed *fengshui* principles delineating a dragon body from the hills to the sea (Song, Ikeda 2008: 59-60; Uezato 2008: 62).<sup>143</sup>

The policies of Sinification enforced from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards fostered the spread among the Ryūkyūan society of the criteria of *fengshui*, which was “employed as a national policy and was applied to guide capital building, city planning, village building,

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<sup>142</sup> A comparative study between Guan Di and Marshal Tian, however, would be of great interest for future investigations. They both are martial deities, possessed entities, magical subjugators of demons, judicial representatives, and main characters of Chinese operas.

<sup>143</sup> “Kume village was abstractly plotted into the shape of a dragon. The Izumizaki Rock is the dragon ball. The space in front of Kume Ufujo is the dragon's head. The two big stones there are the dragon's eyes, and two trees were planted as the horns of the dragon. The wandering Kume Street was the dragon's body. Smaller roads can be found on both sides, which were placed as the feet of the dragon. The dragon's tail extended from Nishinjo to Naminoue. Furthermore, there are canals in the village, which were placed to enhance the power of the dragon when the tide gushed back and forth.” (Song, Ikeda 2008: 59-60).

graveyard-site choosing and even forest management.” (Chen, Nakama 2012: 207). Following this purpose, many students were sent by the government to become *fengshui* masters and provide advice to national matters.<sup>144</sup> One of Okinawa’s most portrayed singularity, the turtle back tombs *kameko-baka*, which are often linked with karate to display in conjunction the uniqueness of Okinawan culture,<sup>145</sup> began to appear around at the end of the 17th century as a *fengshui* practice of the Naha and Shuri elite families resembling those of the Fujian region (Akamine 2016: 91). The custom of paper burning, the *ishiganto* amulets – little stone tablets put in fences, walls and tree road crosses- and the well-known *shīsā*, the pair of Okinawan lion dogs, which repeatedly appear in the set of karate iconographies and virtually at any Okinawan dojo, also are framed in the *fengshui* charm methods against malevolent influences imported from Fujian.<sup>146</sup>

According to Akamine the architectonic orientations and design of the Shuri Castle landscape environments, mountains, fountains, power spots, were planned to attend the flows of *qi* in accordance to a *fengshui* cosmology and the dragon body. (Akamine 2016: 86-87). By its part the Royal Gardens of Shikinaen, a UNESCO World Heritage of particular interest for the karate community because it was guarded after his retirement by karate master Sōkon *Bushi* Matsumura (1806-1894) (Nakamoto 2008: 35), are rendered as a Taoist microcosm (Nakajima 2006: 30).

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<sup>144</sup> See Akamine 2016: 90. For the interactions between Confucian values and Taoist rites among the Ryūkyūan scholars refer to Smits 2014, and Bollinger 1975: “The principal thrust of Saion’s political thought was thoroughly Neo-Confucian, but a further word needs to be said about elements of Taoism and geomancy which remained a part of his thought throughout his life. Particularly in his *Thoughts on Awakening from Dreams*, the wizardry of Taoism finds a measure of acceptance, and various seemingly supernatural phenomena are attributed to the mysterious working of the *yin* and *yang* and the Five Elements. The wizardry of Taoism is recognized as a secret art which transcends the working of nature, but at the same time all attempts to practice such arts are discouraged. According to Saion, one must be born with a special power to be a wizard; it is not something which may be acquired.” (Bollinger 1975: 57).

<sup>145</sup> At the Karate Kaikan building grounds two graves, one in *kameko-baka* style, have been preserved for highlighting Okinawan culture. Karate master Nagamine noted the exceptionality of training at such sacred spots: “worthy disciples who swore special oaths sometimes received the privilege of practicing at the grave site of the master” (Nagamine 2000: 29).

<sup>146</sup> *Shīsā* were used exclusively in the early days by the upper gentry. The Okinawan lion dogs and the five elements theory were placed in the large set of Ryūkyūan ships amulets: “the five-colored flags called on the five elements in yin-yang cosmology [metal, wood, water, fire, and earth] to fend off evil spirits. [...] In addition, the *shīsā* marked with the character for “king,” painted on the front end of the ship, had the magical power to keep away the evil deities and magical monsters living in the sea. The custom of setting the head of a *shīsā* at the ship’s prow was copied from the bird ships of Fujian. (Akamine 2016: 110).

Taoism ascendance, nevertheless, was not privative of the gentry worldview. Several scholars have noted the influence of folk Taoism in the indigenous culture of the Ryūkyūs (Mabuchi 1980; Noritada 1974). For example, *yuta* (women fortunetellers) and divination systems, also practiced by karate masters like Moden Yabiku (1882-1941) and Shimabukuro Tatsuo (1908-1975),<sup>147</sup> are too remnants of folk Taoism. The *yuta* were the commoner's shamanists and healers, who provided supernatural services for the villages using *seiji* (a numinous force similar to the concept of mana).<sup>148</sup> The importance of *yuta* was such that they challenged the social order hierarchy:

Began to rival the *noro* priestesses in the eyes of townsmen, and by 1698 a Taoist 'Lord of the Earth' had been enshrined in Omine Village [...] As they became popular first among Naha townsmen, it is possible that the cult practices were introduced by uneducated sailors passing to and from the China coast. (Kerr 1958: 219-220)<sup>149</sup>

In fact, it seems that Ryūkyūan literati, far more Confucian oriented, were not particularly prone to the use of the hexagrams, numerology and divination practices derived from the classic Taoist I-Ching. The book was, nonetheless, a compulsory matter at the Chinese *Hanlin* academia, the last and most challenging book to be also studied by the Ryūkyūan scholars sent there. Consequently, the Taoist cosmovision is found in the thought of Ryūkyūan Confucian sages, like the celebrated Sai On (1682–1761), a master of *fengshui* and geomancy. Observe by way of illustration this Sai On's passage:

It was in primordial chaos before the creation of *qi*. It is impossible to describe it and we now call it *taiji*. *Taiji* refers to the state of emptiness. In the beginning of creation, *qi* came out from nothing. After the appearance of *qi*, *yin* and *yang* were divided, heaven and earth were separated, and human beings and living things

<sup>147</sup> "The gross of I-Ching diviners in the Ryūkyūs were male and concentrated in the south area of the main island, but the prohibition of shamanism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century prompted the reconversion of many shamans into divination praxis (Ng 2017: 35)."

<sup>148</sup> "Whether this power be termed *seji*, *kami*, or *mana* the basic idea is the same. *Mana* makes the shaman, warrior, ruler, or spirit powerful; it is in itself neither good or bad. In the realm of spirits, gods, and demons, only those who possess *mana* or *seji* are awesome and require worship. The ghost of an unimportant man is equally unimportant unless he acquires *mana*. *Mana* can be generated by ritual; the more potent the ritual the greater the *mana*. Hence by the old time Chinese limited the practice of the more potent rituals to persons of high status; the most important rituals of all were reserved to the Emperor." (Haring, 1969: 59 n.28)

<sup>149</sup> *Yuta*, unlike the *noro*, did not conform and organization neither received authoritative support from the kingdom; on the contrary: "the government began to frown on their activities, forbidding them to advertise themselves as intermediaries between the dead and the living or to act as exorcists with power to drive out evil spirits. In 1736 they were forbidden to represent themselves as healers of the sick." (Kerr 1958: 219-220) However *yuta* practices survived to the contemporaneity, see Allen 2002 Part II (Chapters 6-9).

were born. These were all the wonderful applications of *qi*. *Qi* is the creator. (Ng 2017: 33).

Therefore, Taoism epistemology, the ying-yang paradigm and the five phases methods, was integrated into the broad spectrum of knowledges and techniques of the Ryūkyūan cultural traditions, including folk religion, healing practices, medicine, urbanism, architecture and, of course, martial arts. Influential karate organizations and lineages from Kume area make use of Taoist notions for conceiving and naming their know-how. Such is the case of the *Kojo-ryū*, an elusive familiar tradition, nowadays almost vanished, that is said to date back from 1392 with the settling of the 36 families, and thus to bear deep historical connections with Fuzhou, even by owning a *dojo* there (McCarthy 1995: 41-42; Green 2001: 366-367; Juster 100-105).<sup>150</sup> *Kojo-ryū* system uses the Chinese calendar animal zodiac to articulate its kata and includes Chinese medicine and physics in its curricula (Bishop 2018: 47-48).

For their part, the Meibukan style ("House of the pure-minded warrior"), a branch of *Gōjū-ryū* and the most influential karate organization of the Kume area nowadays, which seeks for its roots in the figure of Jana Ueekata (to whom I have dedicated a section in this chapter), developed a set of modern kata, the most advanced of the style, on Taoist precepts. Those kata are named Seiryū, Byakko, Shujaku and Genbū, after the four respective Chinese mythological creatures: The Azure Dragon, the White Tiger, the Red Phoenix Bird, and the Black Tortoise.<sup>151</sup> These animals are guardians and incardicators of the four spatial directions in Taoist cosmology, corresponding each one to left, right, front and back, and thus determining the configuration of *fengshui* landscapes also in Okinawa (Chen, Nakama 2012: 29). These examples demonstrate how karate styles with huge Chinese influence apply Taoist worldly superstructure to their martial arts methods

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<sup>150</sup> All these elements conform a large part of the Bubishi, the most important karate text thought to have come from Fujian, which will be discussed later. The *kojo* family is equally claimed as one, or the original introducers of the Bubishi to Okinawa.

<sup>151</sup> This group of kata may be regarded as "invented traditions", as one of the programmatic guidelines of Meitoku Yagi (1912-2003), founder of the style, was to re-Sinify his *Gōjū-ryū* school (Bishop 2018: 82). For the history of the Meibukan see Toth 2007; for an exploration on the four animals kata and other Chinese influences see Campbell 2006: "Yagi Meitoku incorporó el estilo chino de saludo y apertura, donde los pies están separados la anchura de los hombros, las manos forman un triángulo en frente del cuerpo a la altura de la barbilla, con la mano derecha en forma de puño y la izquierda abierta (una representación del carácter chino de la dinastía Ming)." (Campbell 2006: 65).

and thinking with ease because such views are embedded in the long and robust tradition of Taoism in the Okinawan archipelago.

In this scheme, the best fitting Taoist deity for the Ryūkyūan culture was Mazu. The next section is dedicated to ground such statement and draw the attention to the military role of the Fujianese goddess, point out at the same time some cultural intersections between Mazu and the islands martial tradition.

### **2.3.2. On Mazu's Divinity: Magical and Warfare Assistance in the China-Ryūkyū Route**

Multiple scholarly research has demonstrated the many engagements and adequacies of Mazu beliefs for the Ryūkyūan culture. Akamine (2016) dedicates large sections to ascertain the central place of Mazu in Ryūkyūan diplomatic rituals; Smits acknowledges the ascendance of Mazu on Ryūkyūan sailors and its fitting with Benzaiten, demon deity of the kingdom (Smits 2019a: 200). Patrick Beillevaire, one of the primary Okinawan studies scholars in Europe, has equally dedicated a work to explore the connections between Mazu, Kannon,<sup>152</sup> and the *onarigami* in the local oral traditions known as “*onari (or unai)-gami to funa-tabi*, ‘the sister-god and sea voyages’” (Beillevaire 2006: 87-88). Uezato, in its study on the Naha port, also noted the homologies of Mazu worshipping with the Buddhist goddess Kannon and the native beliefs of *onarigami*:

The Chinese cult of Ma-stu, associated with sea voyages, had by the early modern period undergone a cultural transformation distinctive of Ryūkyū, melding with the indigenous cult of Onarigami, associated with the supreme priestess *kikoe okimi*, and with the Kannon (Avalokitesvara) cult. (Uezato 2008: 64).

Bearing many names and titles like Tianfei (“Celestial Concubine”), Tianhou (“Empress of Heaven”) or Tianshang shengmu (“Heavenly, Saintly Mother”), the goddess of the sea, protector of sailors, fishermen, merchants, and pirates, is highly revered by her divine and talismanic powers on facing maritime voyages. Concurrently

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<sup>152</sup> Mazu's transmutation in Kannon is not a Japanese exclusive: “her identity as a cosmic force emanating from the Taoist heavenly abode is traded for nothing less than the rank of an avatar of Kuanyin (Avalokite'vara). [...] So striking are the similarities that Matsu is in fact sometimes referred to as the Taoist version of Kuanyin.” (Boltz 1986: 216).

to her importance in seagoing activities, the cult of Mazu spread along the coasts of China, arriving in Korea and Japan. Her propagation was favored by societal contact and an everyday cultural East Asian substratum centered in the protective spiritual power of femininity, generally expressed in women's shamanistic powers and the archetypes of the Dragon Maiden and the Queen Mother of the East.<sup>153</sup> Mazu, an outstanding figure in the Taoist pantheon, is the most popular deity among Chinese maritime communities, to the extent that in 2009 Mazu's beliefs and customs were inscribed in the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by the UNESCO.<sup>154</sup>

Her cult has its origins in Meizhou, a small island in the Quanzhou bay of the Fujian coast. Mazu legend tells that she was born in 960 and died in 987, as a daughter of a seafarer's family. According to the local tradition, during her short time of living, she performed various miracles by assisting sailors to return home in the event of a fierce storm. The foundational myth of Mazu forges upon a dramatic story: she dreams of her brothers in peril at sea and rescues them magically by an oneiric-ecstatic interceding.<sup>155</sup> Mazu was at the beginning a local minor deity that later gained diffusion and an essential place within the Taoist hierarchy of celestial beings, ending as a heavenly empress that ruled the sea, thanks to three interwoven factors: i) the increasing importance of Fujian province in the networks of trade in the southeast seas, ii) the considerable extension of Chinese migrations and overseas settlers communities carrying their cultural heritage, and iii) the imperial promotion of local deities to imperial ranks as means of cooptation and standardization of popular mindsets. This last sponsorship served too as means of

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<sup>153</sup> See for example Kerr 1958: 35-39. This transnational ancient mythology helped to integrate Mazu's figure in multiple ways, metamorphoses, associations, and incarnations around the oceanic culture of East Asia. For example, in Japan, especially in Kyushu area (Nagasaki and Hakata mainly), she also became a tutelary deity of sailors, who generally understood the protecting boat spirits (*fudanama*) as female deities (Rambelli 2018: 197-198). Thus, Japanese written sources on Mazu (also known as "fune bosatsu" or "ship bodhisattva") ended by viewing this imported folk belief through a Buddhist lens as an avatar of Kannon, and by extension with Empress Jingu.

<sup>154</sup> Mazu UNESCO nomination form mentions the Ryūkyūs: "All praiseful titles granted to Mazu by the government are closely related to major navigation and diplomatic events in China, such as Zheng He's voyages to the western ocean (1405 AD to 1431 AD) and the trip of the government envoy to Ryūkyū. Friendly and equitable sea trade greatly promoted the local economic development. Mazu is the friendly ambassador of the ocean culture." (*UNESCO – Mazu beliefs and customs - Nomination form 2009: 5*)

<sup>155</sup> In some accounts she is not able to save the younger brother due to the interceding of her mother who wakes her up from the dream world and thus cuts the spiritual link. Other accounts introduce further references to show the exceptionality of Mazu's persona: some stress special behaviors like never crying or showing sentiments, some even refer her as a medium-epileptic woman. All these narratives transmit the idea of a chosen one, an individual in contact with the gods and the heavenly affairs.

pacifying the coastal zones and put them in harmony under the rule of the Emperor. (Watson 1985)

Henceforth Mazu occupied the center of the Chinese liturgical system comprising sea deities, tied to sailing activities whether in diplomatic navies, trading ships, or fishing boats. The Fujianese goddess became a preeminent figure in the Chinese acculturation of the Ryūkyūs, leading and binding the heavenly protocolary link between the two lands: “once a tribute ship had arrived safely in China, the ship’s shrine to Bōsa was placed in the altar at the Ryūkyū House until it was time for the return trip” (Akamine 2016: 114). In this context, religious rites “showing strong influence from Chinese Daoism” (Akamine 2016: 103) on the occasion of royal investitures and tributary missions receiving Chinese imperial envoys (*sapposhi*) were held in Mazu’s honor at Shuri Castle until late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The liturgies required to visit the temples of the goddess of the seas in Kume and enshrining on board a wooden statue in a liturgical transfer with pre, in, and post voyage observances. This pilgrimage that visited other Taoist sites was accompanied by a parade of music and dances involving ceremonial use of weapons. These customary processions associated with the investiture protocols “had a major impact on the common people, who turned out to watch in large numbers” (Smits 1999, 41). This kind of ritualistic boat enshrinement of Mazu was not privative of official ceremonies; any trading ship, fisher boat or pirate junk in the goddess Sino-sphere had an altar for the sailors to place their idols, and it was common to individually contribute to the ship with Mazu amulets:

Sailors also often brought with them a few embers or ashes obtained from the censer of a Tianhou or other sea deity temple. Typically, they placed the ashes in small red bags, suspended from some convenient place aboard their junk or in the ship’s censer, which was placed in front of their icon. (Antony 2012: 12).<sup>156</sup>

At the dangerous China seas, Mazu demonstrated another excellent property: martial powers. In Imperial records, the goddess is described entering into heroic warfare as a national guardian. Hence, she participates in naval encounters, commanding the fight and granting the military success of an expedition, often in correspondence to relevant

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<sup>156</sup> Fan coincides: “They all put the statue of Tianfei in the main boat, pray in the face of Recompilation of winds, pray for responsiveness, and change danger into safety.” (Fan 2019: 727). The construction of this latter sentence “change danger into safety” is a perfect fit to the Taoist origins of the belief in Mazu.

historical episodes as the reconquest of Taiwan in 1683, for which she was conferred with the title Queen of Heaven (T'ien Hou). Mazu martial expertise explains too why she is often escorted by two demonic generals Shunfeng er (“With-the-Wind Ear,” he who hears in all directions) and Qianli yan (“Thousand-Miles Eye.”) who turned into the goddess acolytes after being defeated by her (Ruitenbeek 1999: 319).<sup>157</sup>

Chinese missions to the Ryūkyūs departed from Fuzhou port, which is surrounded by an area riddled with pirates known as *Wuhumen* or “The Gate of the Five Tigers” (Akamine 2016: 112).<sup>158</sup> Henceforth, maritime missions to the Ryūkyūs were heavily militarized and at sea received the divine assistance of Mazu. In the almost five centuries (14<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>) that contemplated the diplomatic relationships between China and the Ryūkyūs various official envoys that reached the islands testified the relationship between maritime voyages, magic rituals in Mazu’s honor, and martial culture.

Of the several examples historically documented by the chief envoys of the Chinese delegations to the Ryūkyūs, the accounts of Wang Ji (1636-1699) and Xu Baoguang (1719) are particularly significant for this thesis intentions. Wang Ji, a member of the Hanlin Academy, has been frequently pointed out by karate historians as the possible original introducer of the kata “Wanshu” to Okinawa (Nagamine 2011: 187; Higaonna 1985: 19-20; McCarthy 1987: 187; Bishop 2018: 144).<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Sometimes Mazu appears in temples with two extra subdued demons named Jiaying and Jiayou (Ruitenbeek 1999: 320). This four-demon depiction of Mazu’s altar is precisely the configuration that appears as being used by the Ryūkyūan vessel in route to Japan and shipwrecked, from which derives the *Oshima Hikki* account (1762), a very important source for informing about the Kingdom’s matters, and notorious among karate practitioners due to the fact that it refers the exhibiting of Chinese martial arts by emissaries visiting the Ryūkyūs in the person of the celebrated but unallocated “Kusanku”, a military attaché of the Imperial mission. A sketch of Mazu’s altar with her demon servants depicted in the *Oshima Hikki* pages is available at the “Iha Fuyu Collection” of The University of the Ryūkyūs: <http://manwe.lib.u-Ryūkyū.ac.jp/d-archive/viewer/en?&cd=00030300>.

<sup>158</sup> By its geological conditions the *Wuhumen* set a perfect stage for capturing ships to the extent that Akamine alternatively labels the zone as “the Gate of demons”. The sector, thus, was patrolled by Chinese ships and hosted many coastal defenses and security stations: “By the late Ming, there were 11 garrisons, 14 military stations and 15 patrol inspectorships in Fujian. The density of the concentration gives a good indication of Fujian’s strategic position in the coastal defense.” (Ng 2017: 71).

<sup>159</sup> This theory, that has served to give historical proof on karate, is sustained again in oral tradition. In recent times has been losing support and therefore disappearing from among specialized literature produced in the western context and the recent prefectural book. However, is still widely reproduced around the web and referred in other karate textbooks.



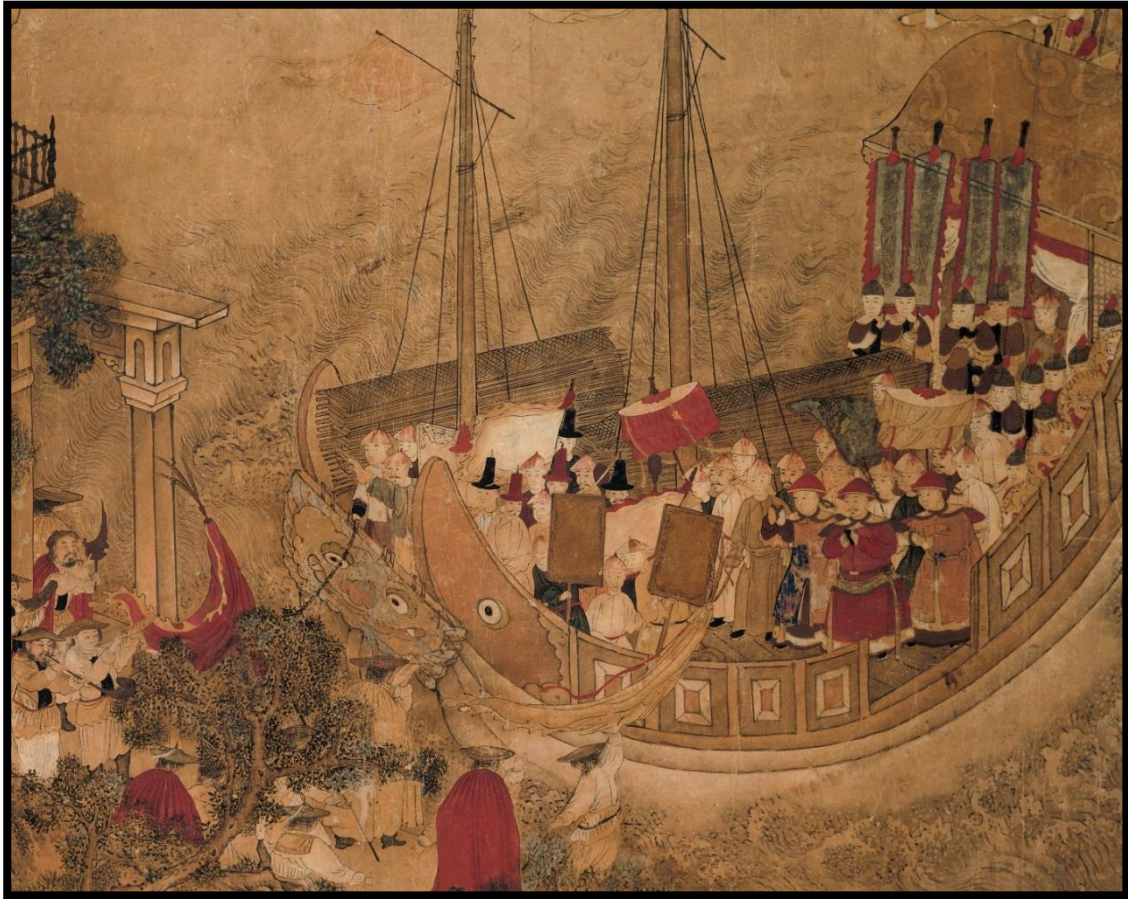


Figure 10 – Anonymous, *The arrival of Wang Ji's Embassy at Naha Minato, Ryūkyū, circa 1800; detail*. Wang Ji is at the ship dressed in red robes. Soldiers appear in the back. Notice the many talismanic drawings on the vessel. Source: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Wang Ji arrived at Naha port in 1683 and stayed five months in the islands.<sup>160</sup> Before departing from Fuzhou, he commissioned a big offering ceremony on Mazu temple in Yishan, west Fuzhou (Ruitenbeek 1999: 290). Once at the seas Wang Ji witnessed on-board a complex ceremonial set that included martial performances.<sup>161</sup> The ritual was conducted when facing the crossing of the Kuroshio Current, a stream of deep blue waters that Chinese sailors defined as the maritime boundary between China and the Ryūkyūs. Under the seamen understanding the Kuroshio was a supernatural element that

<sup>160</sup> When he returned China, he wrote the books *Zhongshan yange zhi*, “History of Chuzan” and *Shi Liuqiu zalu*, “Miscellaneous Records of the Imperial Mission to Ryūkyū.”

<sup>161</sup> As accounted by himself in the volume 5 *Shenyi* (Divine Mystery) of his book “Miscellaneous Records of the Imperial Mission to Ryūkyū” *Shi Liuqiu za lu* (1682),

required the aid of Mazu.<sup>162</sup> According to Shigeyoshi Ozaki the mission passed the maritime boundary:

through very stormy seas, prompting the holding of a ritual during which a live pig and sheep were sacrificed to the sea, and porridge made with 90 liters of rice were served as an offering. A paper ship was built and burned, gongs were sounded, and drums were beaten. Soldiers put on their armor and helmets and drew their swords, repeating for a while a set of motions that had them lay low along the sides of the ship as if to guard against an enemy. (Ozaki 2014: 3-4).

The second Chief of the third Qing envoy (1719), Xu Baoguang wrote in 1721 the *Chūzan denshin roku* (“Report of an Envoy to Chūzan) representing one of the most complete works on the Okinawan culture of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>163</sup> The manuscript, among many technical details of the maritime voyage and various episodes and ceremonies, assesses the worship of Mazu at the seas, and the formal rituals held in her honor at the Ryūkyūs. It also offers a picture of Mazu above the clouds escorting the Chinese vessel on its way to the islands.<sup>164</sup> As for martial arts, it should be noted that the 1719 mission was defended by 200 soldiers who stayed in Okinawa for more than eight months. Some karate historians have conjectured a possible reference to Okinawan karate at the *Chūzan denshin roku*, where the word *tidikun* (or *ti-jikun*, in Okinawan “a clenched fist; the knuckles”) is found. Theories argue that this can represent a sign of the existence of *ti*, the Ryūkyūs indigenous fighting system claimed to preexist the arrival of Chinese martial arts to the archipelago.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Wang Ji, who was native from Jianxi, inland, and thus not familiar with sea rituals, inquired a member of the crew about the significance of what he has witnessed and received the following response: “We sacrificed an enormous amount of food to the goddess of the sea and also displayed our military valor, and that’s why we were able to cross the boundary.” (Ozaki 2014: 2-4).

<sup>163</sup> The Chinese mission was formed by more than six hundred people that, due to a dispute on the valuation on commercial goods, stayed in Okinawa for more than eight months, an unusual case. This was also the first time that the investiture envoys enjoyed a performance of *kumiodori*, the Okinawan theatrical dance.

<sup>164</sup> Available on-line at the digitalized “Sakamaki Hawley Collection” of The University of the Ryūkyūs.

<sup>165</sup> The webpage of the 1<sup>st</sup> Okinawa Karate International Tournament Executive Committee (2018), supported by the Okinawa Prefecture Culture and Tourism Sports Division finds in the *Chūzan denshin roku* mentioning of *tidikun* the evidence of “martial art of self-defense practiced by the samurai class of the Ryūkyū Kingdom as basic education”. This explanation sustain the current heritagization process of karate and aligns perfectly with a modern narrative that rereads karate by way of practiced and developed privatively by the gentry class of the Ryūkyūs, a “World-class traditional culture” with “High-level techniques and spirituality fostered in Okinawa’s own history and culture”. (1st Okinawa Karate International Tournament Executive Committee 2018: n.p.). However, the etymology of the word *tjikun* as referring to a system of fighting is at least ambiguous and thus discussed. For a concise exploration on the linguistic relation between the Okinawan terms *ti* and *tjikun* in relation to karate see Quast (2017b; 2017c). In this last one reference it is explained that attending to a book named *Satsuyū-kikō*

That famous Ryūkyūs martial art masters of the time were indeed influenced by the confluence of maritime travels, and powerful sea goddesses should not be a surprise. Let us consider, to address the conclusion of this section, one well-known anecdote about Sōkon *Bushi* Matsumura (1806-1894), a salient karate father that I have mentioned in previous sections. The story, involving a figurine of Kannon and a return to Okinawa from Fuzhou port, unfolds a praising tale on the old karate master and the quiet spirit of a true warrior.<sup>166</sup> Remember that Mazu has been frequently conceived in the Ryūkyūs as an emanation or equivalent of Kannon:

The rusty old statue of Kannon was a symbol of Matsumura's spiritual conviction and had been handed down in his family for five generations. There was an interesting story about Matsumura and this icon which has outlasted them both. On his return voyage to Ryūkyū from Fuzhou, the ship, as was often the case sailing the waters of the East China Sea, encountered a fierce typhoon. The storm became so relentless that both passengers and crew got really scared. After a day and a night the unending tempest forced some to even cry out in fear for their lives. Only one man throughout the entire ordeal remained perfectly calm: Matsumura Sōkon. While the frightened onlookers placed their fate in the hands of heaven, Matsumura trusted the goddess of mercy, and quietly chanted a sutra while holding his statue of Kannon.

The violent seas had blown the tinny vessel hundreds of miles north off its course, and, when the storm died down two days later, the ship had drifted to Satsuma. Accommodated by the Satsuma Ryūkyūkan (Okinawa's foreign outpost), passengers and crew were able to recuperate and recount the paralyzing experience at the hands of Mother Nature. Everyone was filled with admiration for Matsumura. None had ever witnessed, or even heard of, such tranquil

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(1801) karate was probably exhibited in front of the Satsuma commissioners in Naha: "if *tetsukumi* or otherwise *tjikun* were former names for karate, then this martial art of that era has been demonstrated in front of Satsuma government officials at the Satsuma resident's commissioner's magistracy in Naha (*Satsuma Zaiban Bugyō-sho*). The story of it was transmitted to Satsuma and became widely known to the samurai of Higo (Kumamoto), to which the author of this travel narrative also belonged." (Quast 2017c: n.p.).

<sup>166</sup> The first arrival of Kannon at the Kingdom seems to date back from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, around the same time of the building of the Mazu temples in Kumemura, when she was enshrined as the esoteric Kannon of one thousand arms (*Senju*), at Naminoue Gokokuji (1368) indicating the establishment of Kumano Gongen cults. Kannon was one of the most frequent Buddhist deity found as guardian Buddha (*shugobutsu*) in the altars of the Shuri and Naha elites (Baksheev 2008: 294). This costume and the spread of Kannon cult in those areas was acquired after the Satsuma invasion, in close relation with sea voyages and mainly through and by the 1618 construction of the Shuri Kannon-do (Beillevaire 2006: 7). The representation of Kannon with a thousand arms, sometimes read as a faculty to rescue her worshippers from drowning at the sea, others to crush the menacing enemies, introduces a very suggesting dualistic articulation of welfare and warfare in the East Asian seas. Interestingly enough the extension of Kannon observance in the Ryūkyūs coincides in time with the Sinification policies that reinforced Mazu worship at the center of the ritualistic set of conducts in tributary missions.

composure under such perilous conditions. The mind of a real *bujin* was indeed a powerful thing, and Matsumura Sōkon was venerated. (Nagamine 2000: 19).<sup>167</sup>

Matsumura provided the very first extant written guidance for training karate as moral precepts based in Confucianism, known as “The Precepts of Master Matsumura”, and “The seven Virtues of Bu” these last reproduced at the entrance of the Karate Kaikan Museum.<sup>168</sup> In addition to this display of Confucian values of an educated *bushi* it seems that master Matsumura was a man of strong religious faiths.<sup>169</sup>

Returning to the Chinese goddess of the seas, for Takeshi Hamashita the structure of the Ryūkyūan relations with China including “negotiations between land and sea peoples, and between officials and commoners, in the political, trade, and cultural arenas.” (Hamashita 2013: 78) cannot be understood without the concurring of Mazu’s belief in the maritime order. Mazu observances began in the 10<sup>th</sup> century as a minor local expression of sea commoners in Fujian, and through the course of the centuries grown into an Imperial sanctioned cult, without losing its folk roots, that reached the coasts of China, Japan, the Ryūkyūs, Taiwan and other South Asian geographies. Due to the conditions of maritime travels and her protective characteristics, the sea goddess developed magical warfare properties that came to compete with the Chinese god of war.<sup>170</sup> Although Okinawan studies have dedicated great lengths to the woman’s spiritual

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<sup>167</sup> Notice that despite Matsumura praying and chanting of sutras this superstitious actions are reconfigured as a rationale virtue.

<sup>168</sup> The seven virtues of Matsumura read: “1. Bu prohibits violence; 2. Bu maintains discipline in soldiers; 3. Bu keeps control among the population; 4. Bu spreads virtue; 5. Bu gives a peaceful heart; 6. Bu helps to maintain peace between people; 7. Bu makes a people or a nation prosperous. Wise men of the past venerated these virtues and recorded them in the *Godan-sho*.” (Okinawa, *the Birthplace* 2017: 12). Matsumura is referring is a book on Confucian morals, the *Godan-sho*, by Oe no Masahira (952-1012).

<sup>169</sup> Kannon, after Hachiman, was the most appreciated bodhisattva by the Japanese *bushi* since the Heian period. The Goddess of Mercy was revered not only by this quality but also because she was connected with assisting the blacksmith in his anvil for the forging of exceptional sword blades and the transcendental significance of the sword as part of its owner spirit. No other than Minamoto Yoritomo “kept a small figure of Kannon, which had been given to him by a Buddhist nun when he was a child, tied up in his top-knot.” (Blomberg 2013: 29).<sup>169</sup>

<sup>170</sup> As we have noted Guan Di was an inland deity and therefore its capabilities were remarkably unsuited to face the sea, palling to the water related miracles of Mazu: “For Chinese seafarers fate and good luck, in fact, were more important than virtue and frugality. [...] They had constantly to adjust their lives and thoughts to the presence of the unseen world of the supernatural. Ritual and sacrifice were conduits through which worshippers could reach the sacred realm and influence the myriad gods, ghosts, and demons.” (Antony 2012: 2). This is also the reason why around the 18<sup>th</sup> century Guan Di had lost to Mazu its place as the favorite of south Chinese merchant’s associations (Schottenhammer 2010; Antony 2012), because maritime safeguarding and economic profits had become almost equivalent terms in the sea merchants world of East Asia.

power in Ryūkyūan indigenous culture, little attention has been paid to their warfare facets.<sup>171</sup> This neglecting is even more pronounced when we realize Iha Fuyu's early investigations on the *Omoro Sōshi*, magic and karate; so is the case with possible connections between Ryūkyūan martial arts cultural history and divine women and sea goddesses like Mazu or Kannon. Historical accounts from Korea evidence that in the 15<sup>th</sup> century the Ryūkyūan monarch was attended in his inner circle exclusively by women "Armed with swords, they served as the king's bodyguard when he moved around within the castle. Ordinary soldiers did not live inside the palace" (Smits 2019a: 93). These female attendants were also in charge of transmitting the king orders until a state reform dating from the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century.

This section has sought to provide approximative contributions and foundations to a research line focusing in feminine martial figures at the Ryūkyūs because as Benjamin N. Judkins states for the Chinese case, women are a martial arts studies topic as stimulating as deifying:

Women are a challenging subject in Chinese martial studies [...] It is impossible to come to terms with the traditional Chinese fighting styles as a popular culture phenomenon without first considering the issues of folklore and gender. [...] Many of the most popular traditional martial arts have a female ancestor or hero somewhere in their pantheon. The hand combat traditions of southern China seem to be particularly well blessed in this regard. [...] Yet historically speaking very few women ever studied the martial arts in traditional Chinese society. (Judkins 2019).

Femininity undoubtedly clashes with a certain manliness lying at the core of martial arts, which frequently intermingles with the Confucian virtue order defining the centers of power. The Confucian hierarchy necessitated imposing a rationale upon powerful feminine myths and unorthodox activities like magic. Irwin defines this process in Chinese religion affecting an "obscure pantheon of water sprites, dragon ladies, snake queens, moon-goddesses, and rulers of heaven and earth" (Irwin 1990: 53) as "euhemerization".<sup>172</sup> He selects Mazu as one of his study cases to illustrate the

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<sup>171</sup> With few exceptions, see for instance Chibana 2013. Akamine (2016), and very particularly Smits (2019) books have recently come to revitalize this trend for any scholar interested in the matter.

<sup>172</sup> "By 'euhemerization,' I refer to the classical Greek heritage, initiated by the mythographer Evemerus Euhemerus (second half of the fourth century B.C.E.), by which current mythology is given a rationalistic history. The gods and goddesses are thought to be mortals whose deeds have been magnified

intertwined tension between cooptation and resistance of female goddesses within the Imperial order, which powers are not limited nor controlled by the dominant masculine:

All find their characteristic qualities as female in acts of salvation and grace by which they rescue mortals in danger. This characteristic grace does not function through any hierarchic channels, but is an immediate responsive, personalized act which was regarded as a primary expression of female virtue and power. In this sense, these divinities represented channels of possible transformation that functioned independently of the male social order. In many ways, the feminine principle is regarded in Chinese mythology as fluid, spontaneous, flowing power also aptly symbolized by its associations with water. (Irwin 1990: 65)

Still emerging from folk Taoism and state margins like the Fujian region, Mazu ranked in the divine-bureaucratic structure of the Empire just after the emperor himself. Therefore, for the community of Kumemura and its Confucian literati and merchant elites having Mazu as their main deity was to place themselves under the Chinese emperor rule.<sup>173</sup>

Moreover, Mazu exemplifies the relevance and cultural continuity between the Ryūkyūan (*onarigami/Kikoeogimi*), Chinese (*Tenpi*), and Japanese (*Kannon*), that gathers ancient motifs and archetypes of women as mighty supernatural warriors,<sup>174</sup> a trait that exerted a heavy influence upon the folk symbolism of East Asian martial culture.<sup>175</sup> This feature has not disappeared in recent times, on the contrary. The Fujianese

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over time. In general, euhemerization is a tendency to see celestial figures as deified human beings.” (Irwin 1990: 66).

<sup>173</sup> “As the Empress of Heaven, she appears seated upon waves or clouds, or often on a throne, clad in a long robe with an official girdle, wearing an imperial headdress. She holds an official tablet or a sceptre, as symbols of her imperial status. In rank, she is equal to all male emperors and subordinate only to the supreme (male) god [...] Regardless of her popularity and the efficacy of her saving grace, it was simply inconceivable that she could attain a higher official status without throwing into question the intrinsic beliefs, particularly promulgated by the Confucian literati, in male superiority. The fact that she attained such a high degree of official recognition is an eloquent testimony of an underlying need to legitimize the power and grace of the feminine principle.” (Irwin 1990: 64-65).

<sup>174</sup> According to Akamine the Ryūkyūan official priestess deity, Kannon and Mazu all together participated in the diverse ritual preparations for the official Ryūkyūs missions to China between the 17th and 19th centuries praying for a safe journey. First prayers were presented to the deity consecrated at Kikoeogimi's palace in Shuri Castle. Then a blood oath, by which members pledged not to engage in smuggling (including the import of Christian texts), was carried out at the Shingon temple Naminoue Gokokuji in front of a Ten Thousand Armed Kannon. Finally, the ceremonials held a Mazu figure transfer from his temple in Naha to her altar at the stern of the boat just before it left for Fuzhou (Akamine 2016: 105).

<sup>175</sup> If we remind previous sections, we will take into this scheme that in the Ryūkyūs Tsukishiro, the high priestess leading Shō Hashi army in the Kingdom's unification, was a form of Hachiman. To complete the picture several scholars have suggested to trace the dragon-like Korean origins of Hachiman in an old woman caretaker-water deity known as Yeongdeung-Halmang (“Grandmother”) that emerged in Jeju island in a shamanistic context and that may have acted as ancestral source for Mazu (Heyryun

Crane styles, which largely inspired modern karate developments, were legendarily invented by a skillful, woman, Fang Jiniang, appearing at the *Bubishi*, where she is proudly displayed.<sup>176</sup>

In these regards, that is martial arts, folk beliefs, magic, and elites adoption-neutralization, the next section establishes a dialogue with Mazu's. We will seek to discover and discern who is Marshal Tian, the "god of karate" equally depicted at the *Bubishi* pages. Which are his Fujianese origins and how are his cultural and ritual contexts of devotion among Chinese communities?

### **2.3.3. Marshal Tian: God of Theater in Fujian, God of Karate in Okinawa**

Marshal Tian is the demonstration of the capital influence that the religious and cultural capital of Fujian, Fujianese merchants and the Fujianese migrants' temples in the Ryūkyūs exercised upon the Okinawan karate masters of the 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>177</sup> Renowned and very influential Fujianese martial arts masters residing at that time in the Ryūkyūs, as Go Ken Ki (1886-1940) and To Daiki (1887-1937)<sup>178</sup> were Fujianese tea traders who opened their own shops in Naha. Besides giving direct instruction to the Ryūkyūans and providing fundamental help them in interpreting the famous *Bubishi*, which texts could not be read by the Okinawans because they were written in a mixture of classical Chinese and the local dialect of Fujian, those two merchants and martial arts practitioners set up close personal relations with the most influential karate masters of the time. Other Fujianese and Kumemura merchant elites granted financial help and social networks that made possible for some karate masters to travel to China for conducting business and/or to study martial arts, as in the case of

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2010: 65; Smits 2019a: 43). Moreover, Mazu, Kannon and Hachiman (as well as Tsukishiro) are connected to moon iconographies. See Smits 2019 and Beillevaire 2006.

<sup>176</sup> For an exploration of White Crane legendary female ancestors see: Judkins 2019: "The *Bubishi* demonstrates that within two centuries the creator of Yongchun Boxing had evolved from a historical person with a number of personal students to a full blown initiatory figure with a martial arts mythology of her own." (Judkins 2019: n.p.).

<sup>177</sup> I want to thank Professor Kenneth Dean for kindly providing me texts about Marshal Tian and many clarifications about the Chinese God of Theater. Any misinterpretation is my responsibility

<sup>178</sup> Go Kenki (Wu Xiangi in Chinese) had expertise in Yongchun White Crane, while To Daiki (Tang Daiji) high skilled in Tiger Boxing. (McCarthy 2017).

Kanryō Higaonna (1853-1915),<sup>179</sup> master of Miyagi Chōjun, founder of *Gōjū-ryū*, and Mabuni Kenwa, of *Shitō-ryū*. Kanryō was the son of a small local merchant dedicated to trading firewood,<sup>180</sup> and therefore we could not afford to travel to Fuzhou.<sup>181</sup> However, by the interceding of powerful merchants, he was able to cross the seas:

certain affirme que c'est pour étudier le kempō chinois, d'autre plus prosaïquement pour y chercher du travail ou pour y vendre du bois, ou bien encore des médicaments. Une autre version souligne qu'il aurait été employé par une famille de noble Okinawaïen résidant en Chine (Faurillon 2016; n.p.).<sup>182</sup>

In the same manner, maritime voyages were the entryway of Fujianese martial arts and the *Bubishi* texts to the Ryūkyūs.<sup>183</sup> Commerce and knowledge transfer in premodern and modern East Asia were inextricably conjoined in a temple-market network system, that, I have noted in previous pages, existed in the Ryūkyūs since the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Uezato 2008). The patronage of local elites and their maritime trade unions for building temples and supporting local festivals was a major force in the propagation and standardization of popular cults, as in Mazu's case. By doing so, these elites were at the same time fostering their gentrification and opening opportunities to capitalize on literati schooling received at these same sites (Watson 1985). Temples were marketplaces and meeting centers that, to a certain extent, surpassed the social class boundaries, acting as identity builders for the community. In the specific case of China, a big variety of associations (*hui*) that orbited around the worship, a local patron deity provided multiple social services. For Schipper, this is perhaps the most relevant evolution of Taoism during the early modern era, especially in Fujian areas (Schipper and Verellen 2004: 633-634). These associations

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<sup>179</sup> Higaonna was a plebeian who can't neither speak, read or write Chinese, troubling his everyday life during his stay in Fuzhou. Despite we are yet close to contemporary times the concrete aspects of Higaonna's life give different dates, motives and filiations that, of course, tend to be presented with a laudatory pun. Again, the work of Cristian Faurillon is a exceling exception. (Faurillon 2016a).

<sup>180</sup> "Using a sailing boat called Yambaru-sen he transported loaded cargoes from the ports located in the wooded north of the island of Okinawa. The wood was cut on site and then transported to the Kerama archipelago" (Faurillon 2016a: n.p.).

<sup>181</sup> "Higaonna Sensei's instructor introduced him to Udon Yoshimura, a ship-owner in the port city of Naha. It was Udon Yoshimura who eventually sponsored Higaonna Sensei's passage to China. At the age of sixteen, he left Naha for the Chinese port of Foochow where he stayed at the Okinawan settlement called the Ryūkyū-kan." (IOGKF 2014: n.p.)

<sup>182</sup> "Some say that it was to study Chinese kempō, others more prosaically to look for work or to sell wood, or even medicines. Another version points out that he would have been employed by a family of Okinawan noble living in China". The translation is mine.

<sup>183</sup> It has been long hypothesized that Kanryō Higaonna was in contact or brought from China an edition of the book; the question remains open (Faurillon 2016b)



pursuit commercial purposes, but also a pilgrimage, scriptural, health, and social care ones. Among the many social functions that temple associations encompassed, martial arts training was a common locus:

Many associations ran schools and trained young people in the martial arts so as to able to protect the community when the need arose. All these deeds were *gongfu* (religious merit; a term we now associate with the Chinese martial arts as practiced within the context of temple associations). Because all these activities were performed as a service to the community, we call these associations ‘liturgical organizations. (Schipper and Verellen 2004: 633).

While residing at the Ryūkyūan House in Fujian, Kanryō Higaonna studied with the founder of Minhe Quan (Whooping Crane) *gongfu* master (who at that time was a student of white crane too) named Xie Zhongxiang. Xie had been during his youth a shoemaker's apprentice and later in 1883 will open his own martial arts school at a local temple in the Changle district (McCarthy 2017); where stands, very close to the pier for Ryūkyūan ships, one of the most notable Mazu temples in Chinese history.<sup>184</sup> However, the deity that captured the mind of modern karate masters was Marshal Tian, widely worshipped by Fujian crane martial styles: “Xie Wenliang, master of Whooping Crane Boxing, also has an illustration of this deity in the altar of his home [...] Fang Qiniang adopted the god as a symbol of justice and propriety for her tradition” (McCarthy 2016: 166). However, as Andreas Quast points out, Tian’s worshipping by kung fu schools was embedded in a broader context: “he was revered as the tutelary god of villages in the region of Quanzhou, was worshipped by Fang Qiniang and all the disciples of the *White Crane Boxing School*” (Quast 2015: 74).

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<sup>184</sup> A 1431 inscription found in Tianfei temple congratulates the long-distance voyages of the famous mariner Zheng giving the sailor’s gratitude to the goddess: “All together more than thirty countries large and small. We have traversed more than one hundred thousand li of immense water spaces, and have beheld in the ocean huge waves like mountains rising sky-high. We have set eyes on barbarian regions far away hidden in a blue transparency of light vapours, while our sails, loftily unfurled like clouds, day and night continued their course with starry speed, breasting the savage waves as if we were treading a public thoroughfare. Truly this was due to the majesty and the good fortune of the Court, and moreover we owe it to the protecting virtue of the Celestial Spouse (Thien Fei I). The power of the goddess, having indeed been manifested in previous times, has been abundantly revealed in the present generation. In the midst of the rushing waters it happened that, when there was a hurricane, suddenly a divine lantern was seen shining at the masthead, and as soon as that miraculous light appeared the danger was appeased, so that even in the peril of capsizing one felt reassured and that there was no cause for fear...” (Needham 1959: 558).

Despite the remarkable appeal of Tian's for the Okinawan karate masters in the past, the original character of the god and his cultural background has been forgotten. In Fujian Tian is a tutelary deity of villages by precise abilities, intermingling but transcending the martial features: he is a magical incantator of demons and an involuntary jester.

So far I have pointed out that the *Bubishi* was a martial arts text that reached Okinawa probably in the 19<sup>th</sup> century from Fujian.<sup>185</sup> The Chinese book, an illustrated manual that came to public knowledge in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, gained unparalleled prestige among Okinawan karate masters. In its pages, a little known martial figure depicted on a mysterious posture aroused great interest, regardless of the particular karate school or teacher. The *Bubishi* was presenting Marshal Tian, or Tian Du Yuanshuai, who is actually well-known as the God of Theater in southern China. This deity has become the most important, actually the only one, of modern karate worldwide, closely associated with the styles derived from the Kume-Naha area fighting traditions, in other words, mainly the *Gōjū-ryū* schools. Particularly for influential modern organizations of *Gōjū-ryū*, Tian represents the “guardian deity,” “patron saint,” or “god” of karate; and he is usually appointed to be “Busaganashi”, a misleading etiquette. The word “busaganashi” in the Okinawan language is not the proper noun of a concrete celestial being but the word for “Great Bodhisattva”, typically used as the colloquial appellation of Mazu and Kannon (Akamine 2016: 103; Beillevaire 2006: 3).<sup>186</sup>

The God of Theater, associated with music, opera, marionette and puppet theater, is known by many names depending on the local area and the legendary source. In southern Fujian he is often associated or intermingled as the deification of Lei Haiquin, a real musician of the Tang dynasty (8<sup>th</sup> century) that ascended divinely by his meritorious

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<sup>185</sup> See Quast 2016. Quast provides a thorough and concise research on the multiple copies of the *Bubishi* circulating in Okinawa in the beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The different versions of the Okinawan *Bubishi* passed on show differences among them. The name “*Bubishi*” is a literary allusion, probably dating from the same 20<sup>th</sup> century, to the famous Chinese military encyclopedia *Wubei Zhi* edited by Ming Mao Yuanyi (1594–1640). Canonically thus translation as “Treatise on Military Preparation” is for the *Wubei Zhi* whose contents are not the same as the Okinawan transliteration. Therefore, it would be proper to use the epithet “Okinawan” to avoid misconceptions and differentiate both manuscripts. For this thesis reasons, however, we will continue using the more widespread appellation of *Bubishi* in plain terms. Further arguments will be discussed later.

<sup>186</sup> It is composed in Okinawan language (uchinaguchi) by a suffix that denotes respect “ganashi” and the word “busa” (or “bosa”) that is nothing but an alternate for buddha. Thus, in Okinawan *Busa-ganashi* means “Great Bodhisattva” (“Bosatsu-sama”).

loyalty to the Empire, after refusing to play in front of a group of rebels who ended assassinating him. He can also be regarded as Tian Gong (Lord Tian), Tian Gong Yuanshuai (Marshal Lord Tian), Tian Gong Shifu (Master Lord Tian), or Jiutian Fenghuo Yuan Tian Gong Yuanshuai (Marshal Lord Tian of the Wind and Fire Department of the Ninth Heaven). This last identity of Tian is the one that appeared in the first-ever publication of the Okinawan *Bubishi* by Mabuni Kenwa (1934).

Recent studies have shown, surprisingly, that although being a regional and minor deity in the hierarchical system of Chinese celestial beings, Tian is a significant deity in terms of worshipping adherence in Fujian. In the northern part of Fujian he is the second most common god to be found in the area temples, after the Earth God, and surpassing by large Mazu, who is the seventh (Dean and Zheng 2010).<sup>187</sup> This fact can be explained precisely by the broad spectrum of the god's capabilities beyond his particular field of patronage, a feature that shares with the goddess of the sea.<sup>188</sup> Thanks to Marshal Tian's safeguarding nature his cult is found spread to areas as Taiwan, Singapore, Indonesia, or Thailand, developing copious imagery and an eclectic collection of liturgic arrangements. Although Tian is commonly placed in secondary shrines inside other deities temples, he also has its own worshipping places as, for example, the Yuanshuai Miao temple in Fuzhou.

Several scholarly publications have collected Marshal Tian's hagiographies that express the local heritage and views of the god's figure.<sup>189</sup> Dean and Zheng (2010: 183), nonetheless, have identified a canonical legend of Marshal Tian in a ritual play entitled Theater of the Repayment of Vows (*Yuanxi*), that I succinctly resume here. Marshal Tian,

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<sup>187</sup> The study is contextualized in north Fujian province, at the Xinghua prefecture, which has particular regional pantheon and a different dialect from that of the Minnan regions of Quanzhou and Zhangzhou prefectures, in south Fujian. Despite those divergences the cult of Marshal Tian, with its locale variations is widespread in Fujian province. I want to thank Professor Kenneth Dean for providing clarification on the different regions, contexts, and written sources.

<sup>188</sup> "Although certain gods are closely identified with specific trades (such as Mazu, frequently called the goddess of seafarers, or Tiangong yuanshuai, in Putian the god of theater worshipped by every opera and marionette troupe), these gods also have power over a broad range of activities once they are placed on an altar in a particular temple. These gods then take charge of all aspects of the life of their worshippers, who pray to them for assistance concerning a full panoply of life's concerns including health, marriage, childbirth, schooling, investments, and the resolving of family disputes." (Dean and Zheng 2010: 177)

<sup>189</sup> Schipper (1966) provides another version for the legend were the three jester three bothers amuse the Emperor and help in expelling pestilence demons hiding at the Dragon Palace by making spirit boats and using drums. This may indicate some connection with sea rituals and dragon boat races that take also part in Okinawa and relate to karate.

third son of the Jade Emperor is in a feast at Palace, convened after the successful resolution of problems affecting the divinities as rulers of the country. Dancing and singing the young god eventually gets drunk and falls asleep. While sleeping the princess makes fun of him by painting his red-colored face with a crab on his mouth. Once awoken, Marshal Tian is unable to clean away the crab lines, and this ridiculous appearance raises the anger of the Emperor, who punishes the god of theater. From now on he will endlessly have to go back to the human world for performing the story of his disgrace.<sup>190</sup>

In general terms, the aforementioned is the literati version of the myth, where Tian is the third son of the Jade Emperor and deals with heavenly affairs connected to the ruling of the empire. The vernacular transmission of the legend shows some differences, being the most remarkable that Tian is the son of a commoner (either being a boy of a certain Su family in the Quanzhou tradition or the musician Lei Haiqing mostly in the rest of the Fujian region) who is abandoned after being born in a rice paddy field, hence his name Tian (lit. “paddy field”), and breed by crabs. Despite such adversities, the boy shows excellent skills and passes the imperial exams to end serving as a court musician. On some other versions Tian equally gets drunk and is subject of a tragicomic anecdote: the empress worried, by him being so intoxicated, marks the numbers eight and ten on the bed where Tian is lying, securing that he will live to be octogenarian; but once awake Tian misreads the numbers as eighteen and dies. In other accounts, a fire starts at the

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<sup>190</sup> “The god is the third son of the Jade Emperor. He is bored in heaven, bored by the endless bureaucracy, and longs to visit the human realm. At first he descends as a young woman, only to be accosted by a dog spirit. Reverting to his original form, he subdues the dog spirit who becomes the first of his sidekicks (the others are the lads of Wind and Fire). Th is dog-spirit can now be found in close to one hundred temples in Putian, where he is represented as white dog holding a flag in one hand, and is worshipped as General White Tooth (also known as General Numinous Tooth). Tiangong yuanshuai next decides to enter the womb of the wife of the Prime Minister in a home in Hangzhou. Eighteen years later the Emperor finds his Empress afflicted with illness as a result of his having sent his armies against rebel forces, unleashing killer vectors into the air. A Daoist immortal disguised as a doctor explains that the Emperor must confess his crimes by wearing a yoke, or cangue, like a common criminal. The Prime Minister suggests that his son, who has just placed third (Tanhuayuan) in the imperial exams, will come up with a solution. Indeed, the god has a brilliant idea, suggesting that either he, or some other officer, should wear the cangue in a substitutive act of penance. The plan works, and the empress is saved. The god then suggests that people throughout the empire should wear cangues to express atonement and that this should be supervised by the First Place Examination winner. The emperor is delighted with this plan, and orders up a banquet, where the god sings and dances, drinks and then passes out on the steps of the inner palace. There he is discovered by the princess, who teases him by painting on his bright red face black lines of crab patterns coming out of his mouth (an important feature of his iconography in Putian). The god awakens and returns home. His sidekicks point out his altered appearance, but he cannot wash off the markings. At this point he receives a summons to return to heaven. However, the Jade Emperor is enraged by his appearance, and condemns the god to return to the human realm and to perform the story of his fall from grace on stages all over the world for all time.” (Dean and Zheng 2010: 183).

Palace and the god aids in suffocating the flames by calling divine winds therefore is bestowed by the Emperor with the title “Chief Officer of the Bureau of Wind and Fire of the Nine Heavens”.<sup>191</sup>

Tian’s martial arts capabilities are intrinsically connected to his talents as Taoist suppressor of demonic spirits. Whichever is the form of the cultural practice of which Marshal Tian is taking part, either associated with vernacular ritual theatre or official literary operas, the standard features that explain why he is so highly revered are his magic abilities in fighting (or summoning) evil forces by music, dances and medium possession (Dean and Zheng 2010: 184). The association of theater with exorcistic ritual is deeply rooted in the Chinese Taoist tradition,<sup>192</sup> and for Marshal Tian’s worshippers, the God of Theater is an outstanding ritual specialist in “policing transgressions of Yin and Yang” (Dean 1994: 684).

Thus, the set of Marshal Tian dances onstage that take place at the temple, and usual festivities, annual rituals and thanksgiving to Heaven and Earth are shamanistic in nature. In Marshal Tian’s case, this shamanistic nature is blended with martiality for performing liturgical warfare. Entitled as the “Commander in Chief of the Ministry of

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<sup>191</sup> “In the reign of Tang Minghuang (712-756) there was a woman of the Su family living near the Iron-plate Bridge in Hangzhou. She went for a walk with her maid and stopped by a rice paddy to pick a kernel of rice. It tasted sweet and she swallowed it, and became pregnant. Her father had the maid take the baby away. She set it in the same rice paddy. But a few days later, at the bidding of the mother, she returned and found crabs feeding the baby by dribbling spittle into its mouth. She brought the baby back home. The child was named *Tian*, meaning field, after the place of its origins. The baby also kept his mothers’ surname, *Su*. The boy could not speak but he was brilliant at his studies and won top honors in the imperial exams. At the age of eighteen he was brought to the court of the Emperor, where he excelled in music and dancing. After the emperor dreamt of a voyage to the moon and a beautiful concert there, a strange book was presented to the Court. No one could decipher it, although some suggested it might contain the measurements for the construction of a palace. Suddenly, Tian laughed aloud and said, “That’s *gongchi pu* (“a musical score”).” Then he arranged musicians and danced to the music and it was just as the Emperor had dreamt. The Emperor gave Tian three cups of wine which turned his face red. He collapsed on the jade steps. The emperor commanded maidens from the Inner Palace to help him back inside, where they lay him on the Emperor’s bed. The Empress saw him there, and fearing that he would come to a bad end, wrote the numbers 8 and 10 above him on the bed, intending to ensure that he live to be 80. But when he awoke he misread the numbers as 18, and he died. Other stories have him dancing in the Inner Palace for the Emperor and the Empress when a great fire breaks out in the Palace. He calls down divine winds to put out the fire. The Emperor enfeoffs him as Chief Marshal Tian, of the Bureau of Wind and Fire of the Nine Heavens.” (Dean 1994: 701).

<sup>192</sup> Lijuan Zhang recalls the four elements that have historically determined the intimate relation between Taoism and Fujian Opera identified by Chen Jilian: “(1) The influence of Daoist music on Puxian opera; (2) the assimilation of Puxian Daoist dance by Puxian opera; (3) the large amount of subject matter pertaining to the divine transcendence of Daoism that has served as the fundamental content for the plays of Puxian opera; and (4) the mediating role played by the Daoist priest in the performance of Puxian opera.” (Zhang 2014: 1003).

Exorcism” in local Fujianese manuscripts, he pertains to the group of Chinese deities catalogued as “Marshall Gods”.<sup>193</sup> He is an apotropaic magic specialist invoked for “driving away plague demons, but also for spreading the plague to those who deserve it. Like many deities, he has both a protective and a destructive side.” (Dean and Zhenman 2010: 185). To participate in divine-judicial rituals that connect this and the otherworld is another element in the multi-operability of martial deities as Marshal Tian: “In some cases, Taoist martial gods functioned as law enforcement officers responsible for the capture of demons, but in others, they were witnesses to judicial rituals and even potential judges of the guilt or innocence of worshippers” (Katz 2008: 54). Such a system reflects the dual dynamic thought of Taoism, extending to the center of Chinese judicial ideology, through the idea of inevitable retribution administered by celestial officers.

In conjunction with these purifying qualities, “Marshal Tian of the Wind-and-Fire Department of the Nine Heavens” is an official bureaucrat and a remarkably efficient heavenly messenger. Schipper (1966: 88) argues the denomination of Tian as a celestial officer concerning the ritual practice of writing petitions and documents to the heavenly realm and burn them in order to let the wind send the messages the gods. Schipper traced Tian’s origins to an amalgamation of three jester brothers; therefore, the theater plays of Tian and his biographical folk legends filled with humorous tones would signify a narrative of inversion, a comical reference to the severe postulates of official religion and political hierarchies. Dean (1994: 683) followed this trend by asserting that Marshal Tian “is the king of carnival in China”.<sup>194</sup> In a more recent study, Ruizendaal (2006: 346,352)

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<sup>193</sup> Guan Di, as we have seen also a Taoist Chinese deity that arrived to the Ryūkyūs, is part of the Marshall Gods featuring exorcistic aptitudes: “The case of Marshal Guan (Guan Yuanshuai; Guan Yu) is particularly striking, as he was not only a powerful exorcistic deity, but could also be worshipped by secret society members during oath-making rituals, while members of some spirit-writing groups performed indictment rituals in his presence.”(Katz 2008: 56)

<sup>194</sup> “Preliminary studies suggest that the Chinese pantheon, like the European carnival, could function as a safety valve and also offer symbolic resources for revolt. Female, martial, and eccentric deities were worshiped throughout society, even though their cults could assume different forms in varying social milieus. Thus, the pantheon, like the novels that transmitted it, offered literati and commoners alike a temporary liberation from the Confucian ethos, without necessarily endangering the social prestige of the ethos itself. But given the right historical circumstances, the upside-down dimension of the supernatural could also provide the ideological resources for organized banditry and revolt, just as Confucian educators had suspected. The triads, for example, conducted their initiation right in front of a Guangong altar (Yang 1961:62), and the Boxers sought invulnerability by spirit-medium rituals, in which they became possessed by the protagonists of the Enfeoffment of the Gods, Romance of the Three Kingdoms, and Journey to the West, particularly by Jiang Ziya, Guangong, and Sun Wukong” (Shahar 1996: 205)

traces the god's bureaucrat title, "Marshal Tian of the Wind-and-Fire Department of the Nine Heavens" (*Fen huo yuan Tian yuanshuai*) to a hagiography that identifies Marshal Tian with the three jester brothers, to function in performances of thunder rituals where drums act as magic objects.

The ritual play in which Marshal Tian takes part is conducted in association with a religious specialist, usually a Taoist priest, and supported on ritual plays in possession of the marionette troupe. Hence either the actor or the puppet master will act as mediums invoking the Marshal spiritual powers to drive an exorcistic practice. The function of this conduct, occurring before the actual theatrical play, is to pacify the stage by purifying stagnant *qi*. Thus, the performance is a ritual prelude that serves to exorcise the liturgic stage and to establish communication with the gods, by presenting a memorial through Marshal Tian's puppet. This mandatory prologue is a common and well-differentiated aspect of the god's function (Ruizendaal 1995: 14-15). Lijuan Zhang (2014: 1003) defines this segment as the most important and "the one that carries the most religious overtones" of any Fujian opera.<sup>195</sup> The musical subduing of demons to purify the stage sometimes includes a chant known as the "Incantation of Yuanshuai" (*Yuanshuai Zhou*), and an exorcistic play entitled the "Complete performance of Su" (*Da Chu Su*) where Tian puppet dances by corporeal gestures that seek to reproduce the five elements theory:

The dance of the patron-saint consists of portraying a number of postures with the arms of the puppet that represent the five elements. While doing this the puppet dances over the stage and also paces the eight trigrams. [...] the pacing of the different trigrams by the puppet, as mediator between heaven and man, distributes the forces of heaven over the different trigrams and realizes supreme harmony and exorcizes evil. (Ruizendaal 2000: 347, 352).

Therefore Marshal Tian, also venerated as Tian Gong, an incarnation of the third prince of the Jade emperor, is proficient in the eight trigrams (*bagua*) theory and versed in the Book of Changes (*I-Ching*), which he studied for passing the Imperial exam at the Hanlin Academy (Zhang 2014: 1006).

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<sup>195</sup> "Paichang performances typically have the following eight segments: the three drums, contemplation of the mother's family, the *Xianggong Tapeng*, the warrior appearing as a demon, the fetching of the eight Immortals, the management of the five blessings, the double capping ceremony, and the Guanyin cleaning of the palace." (Zhang 2014: 1003). Remember that Guanyin is the Chinese version of Kannon, sometimes seen equally as Mazu or as the source for her emanation.

In sum, the prominent Marshal Tian's quality is to create supreme harmony (*Tai Ji*) by his numinous power and technical competence (Ruizendaal 2006: 348). All the aforementioned elements, tied to the Taoist ritual and alchemical cultivation, put Marshal Tian in an excellent position to be honored by religious ritual specialists and martial arts practitioners alike.

Up to the moment, I have not been able to find an Okinawan source dealing with the legend of Marshal Tian outside karate circles. The Okinawan version of the deity story connects with the Fujianese traditions mainly by alluding the god's humble origins as a mortal being and his high literary and martial capabilities, mentioning his title in the Wind and Fire department but reconfigured to find accommodation in karate lore. The texts I have gathered reproduce the same tale with minor differences and thus seem to rely on a common oral tradition of unrefereed origin.<sup>196</sup> I introduce here the legend as explained by the International Okinawan Goju Ryu Karate-do Federation (IOGKF) one of the most important karate organizations worldwide:

The story goes that in ancient China, a young girl gave birth to a boy. With no father to raise the child, her family decided to abandon the baby in the forest. As time went by, the girl and her family had a change of heart. When they returned to the location, they had left the child, they found the trees and the forest had surrounded the baby and protected him. They took this as a sign and decided to take the baby and look after him to the best of their abilities. From an early age the child showed great intelligence and right throughout his schooling he achieved great results. So much so, that he was able to enter the imperial military. Now all grown up, he entered the military service he began to learn the martial arts and became a master of great skill and power.

One day a tower nearby where he lived caught fire and was spreading quickly. It would not be long until the fire spread to the rest of the village and surrounds. The now martial arts master heard of this and hurried to the fire. Using his martial arts breathing (like in Sanchin Kata) was able to exhale strongly and extinguish the fire with a single breath! By doing so he saved the city and was honoured by everyone who lived there. The townspeople bestowed him with the title of "Marshall of wind and fire", pronounced in Chinese as: Yuen Sam Tan Doh. In Okinawa however the legend refers to the Master as Busaganashi "Respected martial arts practitioner. (IOGKF 2015: 6-7).<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> See for example Michial (2011: 38-39), Asai Shotokan Association International (2016), or Yushikan Hombu Dojo (2017).

<sup>197</sup> That there might be some *ad hoc* adaptations to serve the karate organization discourse is indirectly acknowledged at the article: "There are two legends surrounding the story of the Busaganashi, the Okinawa version and the Chinese version. Both are basically the same and two most probably became slightly different, as through oral tradition the story was passed down from one generation to the next. However, it was the Okinawan version of the legend that captured the heart and excitement of Chojun Sensei."



The Okinawan tale reproduces the idea of the commoner's deification by virtuous deeds, a child born among commoners that is abandoned and bred by nature, substituting the paddy field and the crab, one of the most iconographic elements of the god in Fujian, with a forest, an essential locus of the Okinawan landscape related to fengshui and *utaki*. Tian is then divinely signified with extraordinary potential and finally proven as an exceptional being. The god overcomes his extremely modest origins to trespass the social barriers, demonstrating superior abilities in both the intellectual and physical planes. This narrative reproduces common motifs used in a popular culture grounded in the idea of meritocracy as opposed to pedigree. The superb capabilities of the boy are also stressed in the Okinawan account, but in this case, he does not enrol in the Hanlin Academia, but in a military one, so the martial might can be highlighted. Finally, like in the Fujianese lore, a reference to the extinction of a fire and the Marshal title is made. Underscored by the pursuit for self-perfection, the acquisition of supernatural powers and the service to the community grant Tian the recognition of the official title of "Marshal of Wind and Fire". The assessment of this designation connects the Okinawan karate version of the god's legend with the Chinese official structure of heavenly beings, which is by no means, as we have seen in Mazu's case, an uncommon occurrence in the Ryūkyūs culture.<sup>198</sup> Nevertheless, at the same time, the recognition is bestowed by their equals, the village inhabitants, underlining the vernacular roots of the tale. On the other hand, we can observe that neither humoristic nor parodic tones, which are nuclear components of the Chinese legends, are included in Tian's depiction.

Just as the legend, another vital element to analyze for understand the transformations introduced to Tian by karate culture is the god's iconography. It must be noted that being a widespread cult, Marshal Tian imagery is rich and diverse, nurtured by different worshipping centers and lines. His variable portrayals display appearances and symbolisms that respond to particular meanings. This is explained by the vast repertoire

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<sup>198</sup> Very interestingly, even in the religious rituals on the Okinawan southern islands of the Yaeyama archipelago, that lie as far away from the cultural center conformed by Kume village as near to the Taiwanese east coast, Røkkum (2006: 171, 229) has identified a *busuganaci*, "a magistrate of the otherworld, a controller of human destinies" that is invoked by the local shamanesses to placate ghosts and "further increase the likelihood of success and the settling of debts". The Yaeyama understandings seem to have a clear connection with the ritualistic and esoteric qualities of Tian and other Chinese deities as judicial marshals. Furthermore, is it important to note that in Taiwan Marshal Tian is also the patron god of local Song Jian martial arts militias and Lion dance troupes, which often perform ritual dances in a religious function for expelling diseases and epidemics.

of scripts and legends dedicated to the god of theater and expressed in the assortments of opera costumes, puppeteers, figurines, booklets, scrolls and temple statues.

Marshal Tian is sometimes characterized standing on one foot with one hand pointing out to the earth and the other to the heavens; on other occasions he firmly put both legs on the ground with a sword in his hand, but he can also be seated, wear scholarly or military robes, be bald or double pigtailed, white-faced, dark-faced or red-faced, with a crab painted in his mouth or on his forehead. Also, he is usually accompanied by a white dog and a roster, two acolytes that are fundamental pieces of the god's religious exorcistic and sacrificial performance. In these regards, notice the following picture appearing in the 1934 Mabuni Kenwa book *Kōbō Jizai Karate Kenpō Sēpai no Kenkyū*. By the great elaborated details and the presence of an escorting acolyte, the white dog is known as “General White Tooth”, “General Numinous Tooth” or “General Lingya”,<sup>199</sup> carrying a banner, we can infer that the drawing is probably part of a Fujianese professional publication.

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<sup>199</sup> “General Lingya wears a dog mask, has red cloth tied to his head with gold brocade on both sides, dons a white outfit with a skirt bound at the waist, where he also has a belt secured, wears straw sandals, and has a command flag inserted behind his back” (Zhang 2014: 1004).



Figure 11 - Marshal Tian first printed apparition in a karate manual borrowing contents from a copy of the *Bubishi*. Notice the high level of details in depicting the attire of the god, and how the White Dog holding a banner escorts him. Source: Mabuni (1934: 147).

Unlike in Mabuni's book, the esoteric nature of Tian is not depicted in *Gōjū-ryū* karate versions circulating today worldwide. They are instead simply outlined re-drawings resembling a sober bodhisattva. Remember that the *Gōjū-ryū* stiles name Tian with an impersonal "busaganashi", or "Great bodhisattva". According to his direct disciples, Miyagi, creator of this karate style, had obtained two scrolls depicting Marshal Tian in Fujian, which he treasured upon his return to the homeland. Furthermore, it seems

that Miyagi was a fervent worshipper of the busaganashi, to whom he and dedicated the 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of every month:

A believer in the Busaganashi, Miyagi dedicated the first and fifteenth day of each month to this deity. He sometimes remained alone in his room up to twenty-four hours at a time meditating in front of the carving (Higaonna 1998: 64)

In WWII Miyagi lost his possessions, including a copy of the *Bubishi* and the hanging scrolls of Marshal Tian.<sup>200</sup> It was in the postwar period that a disciple of the master, named Madanbashi Keiyo (1896-1983), while visiting the Philippines, asked a local artisan to carve a wooden statue of Marshal Tian. (Quast 2016: 82). Back in Okinawa, he presented the gift to Miyagi, who deeply grateful put the statue presiding his home dojo. Almost invariably, Tian's portrayals in karate culture appear to be derived from this model.



*Figure 12 - The original wooden statue of Tian's owned by Miyagi Chojun placed at the Jundokan dojo in Naha. The differences between Mabuni's book depiction and this sculpture are very noticeable. The mystic nature of this portrayal conveys a remarkably different sensation, a quiet asceticism outstandingly opposed to the colorful dynamism of Tian the representations appearing in previous pages of this thesis. Source: Jundokan New Zealand. (2019).*

<sup>200</sup> Although no direct evidence has been found quite certainly Miyagi also had a copy of the *Bubishi*. (Quast 2016: 80-83).

In Okinawan karate, however, and in a *Gōjū-ryū* school, we can find nowadays an exception, which clearly seems to point to the Chinese exorcistic symbolism of Tian. At the dojo-museum in Nishihara of Hokama Tetsuhiro (1944), the Marshal, escorted by two *shīsā* (Okinawan lion-dogs), is presented with half his face red and half white, resembling thus the double identity analyzed by Dean (1994: 684) of the god “drunken entertainer and deadly exorcist.”.



*Figure 13 - The busaganashi at master Hokama dojo in Nishihara. Observe the red and white coloring of the figure, as well as the shiha bi-coloring. More similar to the wooden sculpture of the Jundokan than to Mabuni's book drawing, this Tian portrayal nonetheless retains the pigtails found on this last. Source: Faurillon (2016).*



The gestures of Marshal Tian is subject of intense curiosity for karate practitioners. Thus, they have been interpreted in terms of a fighting technique, that is some kind of kick combined with a hand defense. According to the academic specialists that have researched Tian, the one leg posture with each hand pointing to the heavens and the earth respectively is the central stance of the god's exorcising dance. More precisely the "metal position" in the array of movements for the pacing of the eight trigrams by the use of five elements theories (Ruizendaal 2000: 347-351). By his part, Zheng provides a complete description of Marshal Tian's one-leg dance:

After the "luo li lian" sequence of the upper words concludes, a male choir backstage recites in unison "send out the color!" At this time, General Lingya sprinkles pieces of colored paper and begins to dance. He then crouches at the stage entrance and uses his hand to support the left foot of Tian Xianggong. [...] When the left leg of Tian Xianggong is raised forward by General Lingya, the index and middle fingers of the former's right hand assume the form of a sword pointing toward heaven. Whether coming or going, he uses a single foot to jump left and right. [...] At this point, everyone leaves their seats and dances in figures of eight. Then generals left and right Tieban and the lads Feng and Huo exit the stage, leaving Tian Xianggong and General Lingya remaining. Tian Xianggong repeatedly lifts his left leg, using it to leap in a counter-clockwise direction. Then he joins in a martial dance with General Lingya, as though the two were in battle. Finally, by means of General Lingya stooping down and propping up Tian Xianggong's left leg, the latter leaps off the stage using a single foot. Here the Tapeng dance ends. (Zhang 2014: 1004-1005).

Due to the connections between Okinawan karate and crane styles of Fujian Marshal Tian was placed in the imaginary of modern Okinawa karate masters. Karate researchers, however, have tended to analyze the figure and meanings of Marshal Tian, even the martial ones, without depth, managing martial ethos commonplaces and platitudinous definitions of the god characteristics with formulas like "virtue" and "propriety".<sup>201</sup> Interestingly, the recent prefecture-commissioned book on karate history identifies Marshal Tian as a tea god: "This minor Chinese deity is regarded as 'patron saint' of Goju Ryu in particular, and the martial arts in general, as well, strangely enough, tea!" (*Okinawa, the Birthplace* 2017: 192).

Nevertheless, scholarly research on the popular Fujianese god of theater, acknowledging his martial prowess, reveal a mighty exorcist and an ambivalent figure

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<sup>201</sup> One more time Cristhian Faurillon work is a salient exception. For more on Tian esoterism see: Faurillon 2016.

who performs as a jester, an inverter of the hierarchal order. The god of theater and music is linked to village festivals and rituals, including opera, marionettes, ritual specialists, acrobatics and martial arts schools, often as components of sacred conduct.

To end this section dedicated to Marshal Tian, I would like to hypothesize, in accordance to the facts exposed up to the moment that the Fujianese god of theatre is under a process of transmutation to serve for Okinawan karate purposes. At the Karate Kaikan museum in Okinawa, among a considerable number of historical items, a copy of the *Bubishi*, of Higa Seiko (1898-1966), a disciple of Miyagi Chōjun, can be found. Displayed inside methacrylate exhibitor as the *Okinawa-den Bubishi* and labeled as a “Japanese traditional book”, a page picturing Marshal Tian is shown, here identified as a “Revered Martial Arts General”.<sup>202</sup> In the same manner, the widespread naming of the Fujianese god as the “busaganashi” (recall, nothing but a generic appealing) by karate spheres marks the detachment of Marshal Tian origins and cultural meanings, now reconverted into a generic “military general”, to use the Karate Kaikan denomination. Tian’s image and common attributes in China are being conveniently screened to provide a vacant bodhisattva, ready to be rendered according to new functions and interests in the benefit of karate. Furthermore, it can be argued that clouding the actual knowledge about the Chinese god of theater, in other words, the details concerning his Chinese legends, meanings, postures, and depictions, introduces a suggestive patina of mystery to be read in terms of alluring martial secrets:

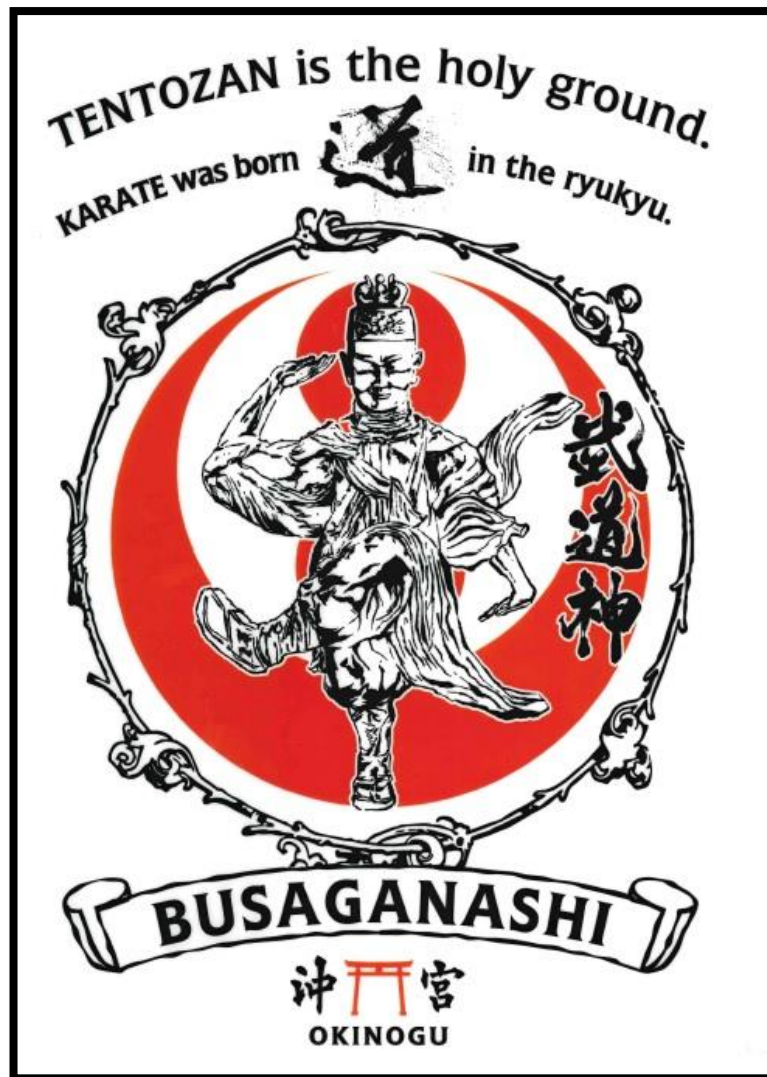
The legend of the Busaganashi is one that is intertwined with the very essence of Goju-ryu Karate, one that held a very special place of inspiration in the heart of our founder [...] why is this mysterious figure seen standing at the front of so many Goju-ryu Karate dojo, irrespective of affiliation, across the globe? (IOGKF Magazine 2015: 6).

Last year, 2019, for commemorating the Karate day (October 25<sup>th</sup>), a karate festival was held at the Oki-no-gū, a Shintō shrine in Onoyama Park, near the Funakoshi memorial and the Prefectural Budōkan. After a ceremony “a gold statue of Busā-ganashī,

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<sup>202</sup> This drawing of Tian is very similar to that of Hokama shown above. Although it has no color, equally conserves the pigtails. Furthermore, it seems to retain a fuzzy reference to the accustomed painting of a crab in the god’s forefront found in Chinese communities.

the martial art deity is now enshrined in the Kangondō shrine located below the shrine.”  
(OKIC 2019: n.p.).<sup>203</sup>



*Figure 14 - A commemorative leaflet depicting the Busaganashi, sacred god of Ryūkyū karate, available on sale at the Oki-no-gū Shrine. Observe how gradually Tian has been losing attributes (colors, details, pigtails, acolytes and other paraphernalia) and is being fixed*

Under my view, the historical consecration of busaganashi as the patron saint of Okinawan karate moves towards a radical transformative reappropriation of Chinese traditions, intimately tied with the heritage-making process of the *Bubishi*, a Fujianese

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<sup>203</sup> “Uechi Ichirō, head priest of Oki-no-gū and a Shōrin-ryū 6th dan who’s wishes to make this site the sacred place of karate.” (OKIC, *First Oki-no-gū Karate Festival 2019*: n.p.).



text, as “the bible of karate”. The debate, long time overpassed, has recently been reopened, especially after the publication of a book named *The General Tian Wubeizhi: the Bubishi in Chinese Martial Arts History* (Nisan and Kangyi 2016). In this respect, Benjamin N. Judkins wrote an exceptional essay entitled “The Bubishi Gets its Due: Returning the ‘Bible of Karate’ to its Chinese Roots.” The martial arts researcher points out an uncomfortable truth:

Japanese authors have been discussing this manuscript tradition since the pre-WWII period [...] While very little in this work outwardly resembles modern karate practice, many of the art’s pioneers drew inspiration from its pages. The Bubishi functioned as a textual witness linking what became a modern martial art to an idealized and supposedly pure past tradition. Karate students have dominated the discussion of this manuscript in the West. Yet, as Nisan and Liu argue (and as I have repeatedly noted on this blog), that is only half of the story. In fact, it may be a good deal less. (Judkins 2017).

The re-set of the busaganashi preserving minimum traits, that is, vague allusions to his martial skills, while connecting to the foundations of *Gōjū-ryū* transfers the mythical legitimacy of Chinese martial arts, the cradle of all East Asian martial arts, to karate. As we have seen when addressing the topic of the 36 Fujianese Families in the first chapter, Okinawan karate frequently seeks to affiliate with the unparalleled status conferred by Chinese martial arts. Equally thanks to the first and second chapters, we have observed how the narratives of the past are, ultimately, the origin narratives of protecting gods, worshiping places and religious observances. Still, the esoteric Taoist principles, the exorcistic nature, and the humorous tones of Marshal Tian received from Fujian’s folk culture, turn out to be utterly inappropriate in constructing a worldwide symbolic referent for traditional, yet modern, Okinawan karate.

#### **2.4. A modo de conclusión: el karate y sus aspectos mágico-religiosos**

Hasta el momento, se ha prestado escasa atención a los aspectos religiosos en la historia cultural del karate, a pesar de ser concebido, al menos en buena medida, como una praxis corpóreo-ascética. En épocas contemporáneas, como veremos en el siguiente capítulo, principalmente desde inicios del siglo XX y de su propagación en Japón, el karate de Okinawa transitó por un proceso de adaptación y asimilación espiritual al *bushidō* tal y

como éste se concebía en el período de preguerra. Posteriormente, a consecuencia de su diseminación internacional en la segunda mitad del siglo XX, mediada por los Estados Unidos, el karate se extiende mundialmente como una práctica japonesa, ética y estética.

Así, englobado por la difusión conjunta de las artes marciales y el Zen, destacando como gran promotor en este último ámbito el filósofo japonés Suzuki Daisetsu Teitarō (1870-1966), y también por la popularización de espiritualidades orientales en un marco modernizante o *New Age* (de las cuales el yoga sería otro ejemplo claro), el karate participa hoy de una espiritualidad ambigua y difusa. Ésta se alinea con una visión occidental de las artes marciales en tanto que religiones civiles (Bellah 1967) o incluso religiones seculares:

Martial arts are now both a product and a part of the ongoing process of globalisation *and* localisation. As such when we refer to martial arts, we are principally thinking of globalised Asian martial arts (with increasing local variations) that share a primary focus on selfdefence, self-cultivation and express these aims through a moving art. [...] Building on this viewpoint we then articulate several categorical relationships identifiable between martial arts practice and religion: 1) the martial art *as a gateway to* established religions, 2) The martial art *as a spiritual exercise*, and 3) the martial art *as a secular religion*. In exploring these relationships we also maintain that each of these interpretations is applicable for any given art and indeed that these categories, while not reducible to each other, are in practice thoroughly intertwined. (Brown, Jennings, Molle 2009: 47)

De este modo, el karate ha sido considerablemente fagocitado por la modernidad, y su espiritualidad des-tradicionalizada ha sido orientada a la realización personal más que a la comunitaria; a pesar de que en la práctica de las artes marciales existan procesos de creación identitaria a través de la comunidad. En otras palabras, el karate ha sufrido una adaptación a la racionalidad instrumental, tan propia de las sociedades consumistas e individualistas. Pérez-Gutiérrez, Brown, Álvarez-del-Palacio, y Gutiérrez-García (2014) han desarrollado esos conceptos, identificando el movimiento *New Age* y las «espiritualidades contraculturales» con la lógica del espíritu protestante del capitalismo según Weber. En este contexto, las artes marciales asiáticas proveen una vía mixta, «la promesa de la auto-cultivación religioso-espiritual»:

In the Western societies such as Spain, the Asian martial arts, strongly influenced by South East Asian philosophies and religions such as Mahayan/Zen Buddhism and Taoism, interpellate strongly with the *New Age* movement since a number of their goals for practice are closely aligned and provide *New Age* imaginaries with a cultural ‘template’ of discourses and practices to adapt. For example, the

idea of cultivating the 'harmonised' body–mind relationship through martial movement forms is typical of Mahayan/Zen and Taoist inspired arts and strongly compatible with Hanegraaf's definition of New Age principles that sees every human being as 'a unique, wholistic independent relationship of body, mind, emotions and spirit'. (Pérez-Gutiérrez, Brown, Álvarez-Del-Palacio, y Gutiérrez-García 2014: 208-209).

De acuerdo con lo anterior, se comprende mejor por qué el karate moderno ha producido sus propios mitos pasando por alto, o más bien reduciendo sus signos a referentes cuasi-vacíos, los vestigios que en él quedan de las tradiciones religiosas de la cultura y la historia de Okinawa.

Uno de los mecanismos más frecuentes para esta pseudo secularización del karate, como sucede con otras artes marciales, es la reificación de la figura del maestro y el establecimiento de cosmogonías a partir de su genealogía. Este procedimiento de encumbrar a un individuo como si fuera un ser irreplicable, sin embargo, no ha eliminado por completo los componentes sobrenaturales en la práctica del karate. Al contrario, estos se han visto transmutados en los supuestos caracteres biográficos de los grandes maestros, siendo uno de los clichés más socorridos las típicas anécdotas que versan sobre sus habilidades sobrehumanas tanto físicas como espirituales.

Evidentemente esto no es un fenómeno exclusivo de los tiempos modernos. Como hemos visto en este capítulo, las habilidades extraordinarias y semidivinas de determinados individuos están en la base de su canonización o deificación religiosa, y es este un esquema que siguen las artes marciales. Tal es el caso de Uni Ufugusuku, el más famoso héroe marcial del folclore de Ryūkyū; o Marshal Tian, dios del teatro en la región de Fujian rebautizado en Okinawa como dios del karate. Las narrativas sobre poderes extraordinarios también están presentes en la historia oral de los maestros de karate que vivieron a partir del siglo XVIII, que son aquellos de los que empezamos a tener constancia detallada. Sin embargo, por la existencia de determinados acoplamientos notablemente individualistas, podemos considerar la veneración al maestro de karate como una manifestación relativamente moderna.

Actualmente, y a pesar de dichos antecedentes, se continúa atendiendo al karate como una tradición marcial con poco o nulo apego a religiosidades tradicionales. Por estas razones, he considerado que existe un vacío epistemológico que requería de atención, pues no solo la cuestión de la deificación de los grandes maestros nos habla de un marcado

sentir religioso-espiritual en el karate, sino que otros tantos factores apuntan en esa dirección. En primer lugar, tenemos el simple hecho de que un gran número de simbologías e iconografías del karate proceden o están relacionadas con creencias religiosas o chamánicas; en segundo, además, es necesario prestar atención a que, como sabemos, algunos de los maestros más importantes desde el siglo XVIII en adelante (recordemos el caso de *Bushi Matsumura* y *Kannon*) profesaban públicamente este tipo de creencias. Ciertamente es que la espiritualidad individual no define el arte, más igualmente es cierto que sin la contingencia de las preferencias de sus actores tampoco puede ésta entenderse.

En sentido amplio conceptualizo este fenómeno de emborronamiento de las huellas de la religiosidad tradicional en el karate moderno como «secularismo mágico». A saber: el mecanismo psicológico y psicosocial que permite a practicantes de karate creer verdaderamente (y afirmar públicamente esta misma creencia) en la posibilidad de acceder a poderes ocultos y obtener fuerzas psico-espirituales únicas, negando explícitamente, al mismo tiempo, la concurrencia de cualquier tipo de punto de vista o sentimiento religioso-esotérico. En gran medida, como acabo de referir, este camino a la trascendencia, a la superación de los límites personales y «naturales» mediante las artes marciales, ha sido reorientado –frecuentemente– hacia la adhesión al maestro y al estilo correcto desde un apego acrítico que presenta todas las características del culto religioso más ferviente. Considero que una de las estructuras que articulan con mayor fuerza esta disonancia cognitiva, que llamo el «secularismo mágico» de las artes marciales modernas, es la disputa por el garante de la técnica correcta. Desde esta perspectiva, a la metafísica laica de las artes marciales se accede por la gracia de una debida técnica, aunque en muchos casos, el certificado de autenticidad de dicha técnica es precisamente la fe en el maestro y sus secretos.<sup>204</sup>

Históricamente, las artes marciales y las tradiciones de lucha han sido vías rituales para la manifestación de poder. Fuera con ocasión de un encuentro a muerte, con una

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<sup>204</sup> No debe malinterpretarse que con esta digresión planteo una enmienda a la totalidad de las artes marciales, a la idea del maestro o de la técnica adecuada; sin esta última, la práctica carecería de sentido. Ahora bien, *grosso modo*, podemos decir que lo que existe de manera más evidente son técnicas incorrectas. Intentar establecer en cambio la superioridad de una técnica correcta sobre otras, aunque tengan orientaciones diametralmente opuestas, es en sí una tarea fútil. Lo mismo aplica para estilos y maestros. En este tipo de complicaciones yace la dificultad, diversidad y riqueza de las artes marciales, pero también buena parte de sus embustes.

exhibición para la diversión de los asistentes, un entreno privado, o una competición pública al más alto nivel; las artes marciales son principalmente una demostración, un acto de habilidad atlética y psíquica. Desde tiempos ancestrales y en prácticamente todos los lugares del globo, es difícil encontrar preparativos de guerra que no estén acompañados de la convocación de fuerzas mágicas y espirituales, en otras palabras, de rituales chamánicos. Por ello, es preciso tener en cuenta esta perspectiva para llevar a cabo un análisis académico completo y serio de las tradiciones marciales.

Este hecho enmienda toda posibilidad de desvincular completamente las artes marciales tradicionales de los sistemas de creencias y las dimensiones religiosas de las culturas en el seno de las cuales se originaron. Ello no es equivalente a asumir que las artes marciales tradicionales del Asia Oriental derivan directa y exclusivamente de una tradición religiosa (o que tengan en ellas su inicio); sino que, más bien, congregan elementos sincréticos de diferentes doctrinas espirituales, llegando a asociarse –a lo largo del tiempo– más con unas que con otras. Por procesos sociohistóricos compuestos y múltiples, las artes marciales acaban por alinearse dentro de una particular tradición espiritual, incorporando predominantemente elementos de la misma. Así, frecuentemente oímos hablar de artes marciales de ‘tipo budista’, o de ‘tipo taoísta’ (aunque a veces los consensos tampoco son claros), ya que intentan englobar en su práctica cosmovisiones basadas en dichas doctrinas. Esto, no obstante, no quiere decir que surgieran como expresiones de tales religiones, sino que se fueron ensamblando con referencia en ellas.

En ocasiones, sin embargo, ya en períodos relativamente recientes, sí se crean nuevas artes marciales a partir de un ideario y como expresión directa de una religiosidad. Tal es el caso del *aikidō*, que nació a partir de nuevas sectas sintoístas en el Japón previo a la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Sea como fuere, un estudio pormenorizado que permita esclarecer posibles genealogías y que afronte las múltiples conexiones entre artes marciales y tradiciones religiosas conlleva una dificultad que desbordaba, con mucho, el marco de esta tesis. Valga, no obstante, esta digresión general para significar que, sin ser genuinamente religiosas y albergando debates en su seno sobre la necesidad, eficacia o conveniencia de recurrir a orientaciones místicas, las artes marciales tradicionales no pueden entenderse como culturas históricamente seculares.

Desde esta consideración, por tanto, ha resultado necesario analizar la configuración del karate y de sus referencias simbólicas posando la mirada sobre el

sustrato religioso de las Ryūkyū, el cual es, a su vez, expresión de una larga historia de encuentros interculturales con mitos y creencias provenientes de otras geografías culturales del Asia Oriental. El karate de Okinawa maneja una profusa iconografía en los emblemas y objetos de las escuelas, en publicaciones, estatuillas, parches, uniformes, camisetas y todo tipo de objetos de consumo moderno. Los referentes culturales de estos símbolos, *tomoe*, animales mitológicos como dragones y *shīsā* (perros-león), perlas, y deidades budistas y taoístas, han sido comúnmente objeto de estudios y aproximaciones superficiales o llenas de omisiones significativas.

La necesidad de investigar los aspectos religiosos del pasado histórico y cultural de Ryūkyū para poder entender el karate, en definitiva, derivan no únicamente de una razonable necesidad metodológica, común a cualquier investigación sociológica y desde los estudios culturales; sino también de haber descubierto cómo las biografías de algunos de los más afamados maestros de karate del siglo XX se relacionaban íntimamente con talentos proféticos y experiencias místico-religiosas. Por ejemplo, Moden Yabiku (1882-1941), probablemente la figura más importante del kobudō de Okinawa de las primeras décadas del siglo XX y fundador de la *Ryūkyū Kobujutsu Kenkyu Kai* (Asociación para la investigación del Kobujutsu de Ryūkyū) en 1911,<sup>205</sup> fue un hombre fervientemente religioso que, además, dominaba artes hipnóticas y adivinatorias (*yuta*) (Nakamoto 2008: 192).

En otras ocasiones, las vivencias taumatúrgicas de los maestros han dado lugar a la propia creación de un estilo, tal y como ocurre con Higa Seitoku (1921-2006), otra figura de capital importancia (aunque considerablemente desconocida) en la transmisión del kobudō de Okinawa en el siglo XX. Higa comenzó a enseñar artes marciales tras tener una revelación mística donde un anciano que decía llamarse Motobu *Seijin* («sabio» o

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<sup>205</sup> “It was largely through the pioneering efforts of *Yabiku Moden (1882-1941)*, that *Ryūkyū kobudō* first gained some recognition as a related combative discipline through its association with modern *karatedo*. In an effort to further study and promote the relatively unknown discipline, Master *Yabiku* established the *Ryūkyū Kobujutsu Kenkyukai* (The *Ryūkyū* Martial Arts Research Society,) in 1925. The principal *kobudō* teacher of *Taira Shinken*, *Yabiku Moden* was regarded as the first cohesive force behind establishing *kobudō* as single discipline. The Research Society helped lay the foundation upon which a more intensified movement was launched by Master *Taira* to carry on the unfinished work of his predecessor *Yabiku Moden*. *Taira Shinken* devoted his entire life to *kobudō*, and, through his ceaseless efforts, contributed much to its growth and development. Having gained unprecedented support from the *karate* community, *Taira* founded the *The Ryūkyū Kobudō Hozon Shinkokai* in 1955, and later, in 1964, he published the first introductory text on the tradition entitled ‘*Ryūkyū Kobudō Taikan*’ (‘The Encyclopedia of *Ryūkyū Kobudō*.’)” (McCarthy 2013: n.p.).

«santo» en Okinawense) y ser instructor de artes marciales en Ryūkyū trece siglos antes, le confió una serie de instrucciones espirituales. Así, Motobu Seijin terminó por convertirse en el *Bugei no Kami* («dios de las artes marciales») de Higa (Bishop 1996: 94). Este tipo de revelaciones místicas, además, acercaría a Higa con la tradición de las *kaminchu* (médiums) de Okinawa.

Shimabukuro Tatsuo (1908-1975), fundador del estilo de karate *Isshin-ryū*, y primer okinawense contratado formalmente para ser instructor de los marines destinados en las bases militares estadounidenses en Okinawa, también tendría este tipo de revelaciones. Ya desde la niñez, las experiencias sobrenaturales formaron parte de la vida de Shimabukuro, pero quizá la más singular de ellas la protagonizó una diosa del mar, conocida popularmente como *Isshin-ryū no megami*. La imagen de esta diosa es el emblema oficial del estilo de karate de Shimabukuro. Puede observarse que la *Isshin-ryū no megami* posee medio cuerpo de dragón, reflejando claramente un rastro del arquetipo de las «princesas dragón» (hijas, hermanas) de Ryūjin («Rey Dragón del Mar», en japonés) o Longwang («El Rey Dragón de los Cuatro Mares», en chino), como hemos visto muy presente en la cultura de Okinawa. Desde esta perspectiva, la diosa del karate *Isshin-ryū* emparentaría con deidades como Mazu o Kannon.



*Figure 15 - Parche bordado con el escudo oficial del estilo okinawense de karate Isshin-ryū. Nótese el uso de una profusa iconografía que, a la luz de lo expuesto revela antiguas simbologías y mitos del Asia Oriental, emparentados con las 'Dragon Maiden' o Hijas-Hermanas del Rey Dragón del Mar.*

Los maestros okinawenses de principios del siglo XX fueron los primeros en tener la oportunidad de publicar libros y documentos gráficos entorno al karate, legando de este modo las imágenes que rodeaban su esfera cultural y que se conservan hasta nuestros días. En este segundo capítulo hemos podido repasar algunas de ellas, dando cuenta tanto de orígenes, significados y reconfiguraciones, como de disputas apropiativas por su representatividad. Así pues, la semiótica tradicional del karate, y algunos de los objetos en que se encarna, es aún hoy un campo de batalla en la escenificación de la legitimidad de escuelas y maestros. A partir de ello, es sencillo comprender la importancia y vigor que conservan los símbolos y expresiones religiosas vinculadas a la cultura del karate. El



capítulo tercero, entre otros temas, aborda cómo la religión y la espiritualidad intervienen en la construcción de Okinawa como «el lugar sagrado del karate» o «la Mecca del karate»,<sup>206</sup> sustentando a su vez el proceso de patrimonialización y turistificación del arte marcial de Okinawa.

En este sentido es bueno recordar, como he apuntado, que todas las artes marciales y tradiciones de lucha funcionan como «rituales de poder», es decir, de ejecución y exhibición de poder físico y espiritual. Esto no sorprende ahora que sabemos que en el pasado de Ryūkyū, como en el de muchas otras culturas, la consecución de poderes guerreros y marciales estaba estrechamente unida a la capacidad de acceder a lo sobrenatural, de obtener el favor de lo divino. Hemos visto que la cultura marcial de Okinawa se ha construido sobre diversas creencias y costumbres, abrigando un sinnúmero de tradiciones religiosas como las relacionadas con el chamanismo indígena de Hachiman, Mazu o Marshal Tian. De este modo, Ryūkyū y el karate han ido incorporando cosmovisiones y epistemologías procedentes de diversas áreas del Asia Oriental. En nuestro tiempo presente, tan a menudo caracterizado como secular, los símbolos sagrados resuenan todavía con las cosmovisiones del ser humano, entremezclándose, en este caso, con la auto-recreación narrativa de la comunidad del karate.

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<sup>206</sup> Véase por ejemplo Ryūkyū Shimpō (2014) u Okinawa Karate Information Center (2019) . La misma denominación de lugar sagrado del karate se aplica por igual al Okinawa Karate Kaikan (Ryūkyū Shimpō 2017) o al mismísimo Castillo de Shuri (Okinawa Karate Information Center 2020).

## **Chapter 3. Recentering Karate in the Contemporaneity: Dissemination, Heritagization and Commoditization**

The third part of this thesis is dedicated to analyzing karate in the 20<sup>th</sup> century from a broad scope that goes beyond the history of the discipline itself (meaning styles, branches, associations, etc.) to intersect with the academic, social, and humanities fields, as well as emergent phenomena like globalization, media and tourism. Henceforth more significant efforts will be put on the second half and first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when karate converted into a national asset widely circulates in the global culture as a Japanese icon.

Broadly three stages are defined to explore karate from the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The first one covers the events taking place before WWII when karate is included in Japan's national *Budō* system; the second comprises the postwar restoration and revival of Japanese martial arts, with the first wave of globalization that reaches the mid-90s where karate occupies a central role; finally, the third stage considers karate as a piece of both the cultural renaissance of Okinawa in the 90s as well as the Japanese policies for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In short, I will start with the first section that gives attention to pre-war karate and the assimilation of Okinawa by the Japanese state; then, the thesis proceeds with an analysis of karate as an international representational device in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century second half. The following segments focus on the most recent developments of karate in relation to heritage, tourism and the Cool Japan strategy.

### **3.1. Ties that Bind: Okinawa, Japan, Karate and *Budō***

Between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Ryūkyū Kingdom remained as a vassal state both of Japan and China. Commerce continued mainly under Satsuma clan control, who extracted notable profits from the Ryūkyūan trade network, although less than expected because of the opening of the Nagasaki port to Chinese trading ships, up to 30 a year (Kreiner 2001:9), and the operations of the Dutch East India Company. The actual dimension of Ryūkyūan/Satsuma trade, however, must be far beyond the official records,

as was not under effective regulation by the Shogunate, and smuggling activities were of considerable scale (Cullen 2003:157-158).

In this scheme, the Ryūkyūs islands chain represented a weak point of Japan's seclusion policy for international relations, especially with European potencies commonly known as *sakoku*. Beyond its peripheral geographic situation, the requirement of Ryūkyūan diplomatic and merchant duties in which China contributed creating an inside-outside *sakoku* status for the Kingdom, where contradictory needs raised much preoccupation for the Japanese Government in terms of domestic security.<sup>207</sup> Many powers were extorting or looking to extort their influence on the Ryūkyū Kingdom, not only as a gateway to Japan but as a nodal place in the East China sea, virtually at the same distance from Taiwan, Kyūshū and Korea. Among increasing militarism and diplomatic tensions, the Ryūkyūs became a delicate testing field of politics calibrations that included the Ryūkyūan King himself, the Chinese Empire surveillance, the Satsuma clan control, the Shogunate challenges and European, North American and Russian expansionism. To sum up, it can be said that around the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the Ryūkyū Kingdom was in-between Japan's domestic problems, which will lead to the founding of the Meiji Restoration (1868-1912), and the international politics played by several empires:

Prince Shimazu Nariakira began trade negotiations with Western countries through Ryūkyū, after Western fleets under U.S. Commodore Calbraith Perry, the Russian Admiral Evfimii Vasil'evich Putiatin, and several French fleets had pressured Ryūkyū into trade and alliance agreements. (Kreiner 2011: 9-10).

In 1871 feudal domains were abolished in Japan to be substituted by prefectures; the next year the Ministry of Foreign Affairs communicated to a delegation of the Ryūkyū Kingdom in Tokyo that the status of the island was to be changed to *han* ("fiefdom"), falling entirely into Japan jurisdiction and international interests. For Akamine, this was a strategic move towards the definitive clearance of the Ryūkyūs double vassalage, setting

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<sup>207</sup> "Foreigners who came to the Ryūkyūs had to be handled carefully: if they were not military men (and even then policy had to be a guarded one), they could neither be ejected, which could become a *casus belli*, nor, on the other hand, ignored. It was, however, only too clear that so many isolated appearances off the coasts of Japan and the toleration of a few foreigners in the Ryūkyūs would soon lead to something greater on the diplomatic or security front." (Cullen 2003: 174).

a first step for the following incorporation to the modern Japanese nation as the Okinawa Prefecture (Akamine 2016: 143).<sup>208</sup>

Obviously, the unilateral decision to abolish the Ryūkyūs monarchy and asserting the Japanese Government rule was not welcomed by China. An incident of that same year involving a massive killing of Ryūkyūans in Taiwan by aborigines, nonetheless, will underline the Empire weakness,<sup>209</sup>

The incident was a test of the Meiji regime's ability to affirm its leadership of a modern state. If those fishermen, Ryūkyū subjects, were to be considered Japanese citizens, it would be incumbent upon the government to seek satisfaction for their tragedy [...] If not viewed as Japanese citizens, Japan's claim to the Ryūkyūs would, of course, be destroyed. This was something the leaders could not concede, especially in view of an aroused domestic opinion. Both within and without the government, voices called for strong action to avenge the damages done to Japanese citizens and to 'punish' the 'uncivilized' people of Taiwan who had dared to assault Japanese subjects. The vocabulary was similar to what Westerners had used in retaliating against Japanese attacks on their nationals. (Commodore Perry, in fact, had dealt severely with Okinawan authorities when one of his sailors was killed by local residents.) Inaction in the face of such an assault would be taken as a sign of weakness, as evidence that Japan was not yet as strong a state as America and the European countries. (Iriye, Janen 1989: 741-742).

Therefore, the Taiwan incident, the Ryūkyūs dispute, and the “modern state” reasoning presented by Meiji authorities triggered the process by which the Ryūkyūs were annexed by Japan, “following the contemporary model of European annexation of Pacific islands” (Cullen 2003: 227), also known as *Ryūkyū Shobun* (“The disposal of the Ryūkyūs”, 1872-1880), a pristine programmatic definition.<sup>210</sup> In 1879 the Ryūkyūs

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<sup>208</sup> “like all of Japan’s feudal domains, the kingdom fell under domestic administration and in the future would be subject to the policy of *hanseki hōkan*, the return of feudal lands and population to the emperor as well as that of *haihan chiken*, the replacement of the feudal domains with prefectures.” (Akamine 2016: 143).

<sup>209</sup> Japan demanded compensation for the Ryūkyūan lives; China declared the issue a matter of internal jurisdiction for the reason that both Taiwan and the Ryūkyūs were Chinese territories. Japan sent a punishment expedition to Taiwan and China reacted by withdrawing and accepting the Japanese demands in 1874. The Ryūkyūan government was petitioned to cease its relations to China, who in 1978 pursued EEUU to intercede. The treaties, that divided the Ryūkyūan islands conceding the southern archipelago of Miyako and Yaeyama to China were finally not signed: “China was lobbied by a strong exile group from Ryūkyū to work towards splitting the islands in three: the Amami islands to be handed over to Japan, the main island to remain an independent kingdom, and Miyako and Yaeyama to be handed to China (to be returned to Ryūkyū later on)” (Kreiner 2001: 10-11).

<sup>210</sup> For deepening in the Taiwan event and the political maneuvers up to 1885 see Akamine (2016: 145-158); for the *Ryūkyū Shobun* intricacies see Oguma (2014: 15-36), and Meyer (2015).

became Okinawa Prefecture; the last Ryūkyūan King Shō Tai (1843–1901), representant of the old order, was deposed, given the title of marquis and sent to Tokyo.<sup>211</sup>

The academic research regarding the issue of Okinawa's annexation tend to rotate on the notion of “forceful annexation.” For example, Akamine (2016) dedicates the last pages of his book to the many diplomatic and political movements of Ryūkyūan elites to confront the demise of the Kingdom. In contrast, Oguma notes how “though ordinary Okinawan residents had no feelings of allegiance towards the Japanese government, either, they had scant affection for the Ryūkyū Dynasty's samurai class that had dominated them” (Oguma 2014: 6).<sup>212</sup>

Leveling group interests and inclinations, including academics,<sup>213</sup> on cultural identity to the whole society needs, presents several methodological problems which, in the case of an outdated and impoverished feudal system as the Ryūkyūan, becomes more evident. From this standpoint, however, we cannot infer the inexistence of the cultural gap between Okinawa and Japan, to many times excessively overperformed in profit of domination and discrimination. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, three historical trends had accentuated the once close cultural affinity between Okinawa and Japan: Tokugawa *sakoku* –that severely restricted peoples' moves and strictly delineated national boundaries, and the combined effects of post-Satsuma Sinification and de

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<sup>211</sup> Regarding the live in Tokyo of the last Ryūkyūan king there is a remarkably interesting paper by Rosa Caroli, another of the European leading scholars in Okinawan studies. She refers how one of the most renowned karate masters of the first 20<sup>th</sup> century half, Kyan Chotoku (1870-1945), spent his childhood in the king's immediate vicinity: “The Shō family residence in Kōjimachi is mentioned by people who visited it or lived there. For example, the karate master Kyan Chōtoku (1870–1945) stayed there for about eight years. He was the son of Kyan Chōfu ueekata, a royal government official who took part in the missions sent by Shō Tai to Tokyo, and in 1879 followed him to the capital bringing his children along. In his ‘Reminiscence of karate’ written in 1942, Chōtoku remembered the period when he stayed at the Shō family residence and studied Chinese classics at the Nishōgakko in Fujimimachi. He was required to practise karate in the garden with his father even when it was snowing, while everybody else coming from Okinawa seemed to freeze to death in wintertime. Nevertheless, during his eight years in Tokyo he never caught a cold, and he could spend a happy youth in the capital.” (Caroli 2013: 261).

<sup>212</sup> Smits agrees: “When Japan's Meiji state moved definitively to annex Ryūkyū in 1879, some Ryūkyūan elites protested and passively resisted. The annexation, however, engendered no widespread popular opposition, whether in Okinawa or other islands. During the late nineteenth century, there was little popular loyalty to or nostalgia for the kingdom, or what might be better termed the regime in Shuri. As it turned out, life under the Meiji state, initially at least, was not much different or better than it was during the latter years of the kingdom, especially in Sakishima. Nevertheless, only former elites made any effort to maintain or restore institutions from the kingdom.” (Smits 2019a: 238-239).

<sup>213</sup> “From then until well into the twentieth century, questions of culture and its relationship with individual and national identity became almost an obsession in journalistic and academic discourse within Okinawa” (Smits 2019a: 239).

Japanization policies. In sum, the historical evolution towards modern nation-states pressed border control and inner cultural standardization. Meiji Reforms strengthened these modernizing developments, and military and imperialistic oligarchies of pre-war Japan imposed uniformization and ultra-nationalism from the centre. Outlying cultures inside the state borders were inferior and disposable, and all the subjects must be indoctrinated to the sole service of the Emperor and the Nation.

Of the many assimilation policies, or *doka seisaku*, that followed the establishment of the Okinawa Prefecture inside the ongoing nation-building of Japan, the public schooling system inaugurated in 1881, and the institution of physical exams for military conscription in 1898 are of particular interest to consider the place of karate in the Okinawa Japan dialectics. Both factors remarkably frame and help to understand the transformations underwent by karate during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. If the “Japanization” of karate means the adaptation of the Okinawan martial arts to the structures and reasons of modern *budō* born from Meiji, then it is proper to acknowledge that Okinawan masters were the first initiators of such process. A good number of karate masters pertained to factions of Okinawan low elites and new middle classes that saw the incorporation to the Japanese nation as a gate to modern citizenship (*kokuseki*) and social stratum mobility.<sup>214</sup> Thus, against the opinion of other “traditionalists” and pro-Chinese masters, prominent karate personalities, allied with Japanese authorities and influential Okinawans, urged for modernizing karate, which ultimately meant “Japanizing” karate.

The *kokumin kyōiku* or “education for becoming nationals” was the primary mechanism to enculturate young generations of Okinawans for being proper Japanese. During the first stages of schooling system implementation in Okinawa, enrollment and attendance were at meager rates (3% in elementary level).<sup>215</sup> The first Sino-Japanese War brought a turning around this situation because the defeat of the Qing dynasty supposed the break of many residents’ mental constructs about the perceived power of the Chinese

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<sup>214</sup> For an historical outline of the western concept of “citizenship” adaptation by Meiji Japan and its role in Okinawa see Morris-Suzuki (2017).

<sup>215</sup> “Schools were nicknamed ‘*Yamato-ya*’ (Yamato being a traditional name for mainland Japan (*naichi*), and ‘-ya’ commonly signifying a business establishment), and a rumour apparently arose that if children were allowed access to ‘Yamato learning,’ they would abandon their homes and be spirited away by the *naichi*.” (Oguma 2014: 40).

Empire. Such alteration of the imaginary was especially significant among the young children of the new generation:

Playing Japanese soldiers and singing Japanese military songs reportedly made a clean sweep of all other games. Amid such a situation, the school enrolment rate leapt to forty-five percent for boys and seventeen percent for girls, and by 1907, even overall, it had climbed to ninety-three percent (Oguma 2014: 41).

By its part karate had been first included in some Okinawan schools in 1901, and in October of 1908, Itosu Ankō (1831-1915) wrote a letter to the Okinawan Prefectural Education Department commonly known as “The Ten Teachings of Karate.” Itosu, a famous karateka, a disciple of Sōkon *bushi* Matsumura, and teacher of many of the most 20<sup>th</sup> century reputed karate masters;<sup>216</sup> was an instructor at the Okinawa School for Teachers and the Okinawa First Middle High School. The letter constituted a crucial step in his efforts to introduce karate to the official curricula for all Okinawan schools. To do so, he was developing a modern form of the art, with comprehensive technical adaptations that made it suitable for training large groups. By aligning with the objectives of a physical education program inside the national polity (*kokutai*), Okinawan karate, which had already gained the attention of the Japanese military service examiners in the islands, began to spread institutionally. For Meiji Japan, the education of frontiers’ peoples and the security of the nation were all part of one patriotic program: “‘sentiments of reverence for the emperor and patriotism’ should be fostered through language unification, reform of customs, cultivation of morality, and the like.” (Oguma 2014: 40).

The ideologic conforming to State Shintō and the veneration of the nation and the Emperor was also addressed by Itosu. The very first words of his letter are: “Karate does not derive from Buddhism or Confucianism.” (*Okinawa, the Birthplace of Karate* 2017: 25). Itosu’s position participated from a broader intellectual discourse in Okinawa, where modernization, understood as the acquiescence with the Japanese nation-state, was the only means to ennoble the status of the prefecture. In 1911 Iha Fuyu wrote an opinion he shared with Yanagita Kunio: “after the elimination of Confucianism and Buddhism of the religion of the Southwest Islands, there remains a from nearly the same as that of Japanese

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<sup>216</sup> Among them Funakoshi Gichin (1868–1957), founder of *Shōtōkan*, Mabuni Kenwa (1887–1952), founder of *Shitō-ryū*, Choki Motobu (1870–1944), Yabu Kentsu (1866–1937), Hanashiro Chomo (1869–1945), and Chibana Chōshin (1885–1969).

Shinto” (Kreiner 1968: 103). Here we find another concurrence of karate and religion.

For the first Okinawan ethnologists:

The knowledge of a deep relationship between the Japanese culture and that of the Southwest Islands has led to the assumption that obvious differences are only due to the comparatively later influences from abroad (especially from China) on the culture of the latter. If these influences could be disregarded, the culture of the Southwest Islands was thought to represent an old stage of the Japanese culture and was therefore treated as such by the Japanese Volkskunde (Kreiner 1968: 103).



*Figure 16 - A picture showing early testing of kendō and baseball protections as karate equipment for full-contact training. Karate was experimenting as other martial arts with modern possibilities to develop for sportive purposes. Mabuni Kenwa on the left.*



Likewise, if the later and foreign influences on the Ryūkyūan martial arts, spiritual, technical (Chinese mainly) are abandoned, the true essence of karate as *budō* will be revealed. Some years later, Mabuni Kenwa, the *Shitō-ryū* founder and Nakasone Genwa, editor and politician, will publish *Kobo Kenpo Karate-Do Nyumon* (1938), asserting that “in Okinawa the original character of the Japanese ethnic group survives. There, Karate Kempo was developed in an ideal way”, and that “karate is a direct legacy of Budo” (Mabuni, Nakasone 2001: 28).

A manifold of events would come to strengthen the ties between karate, education and *budō* to conform a subsystem that would drive at a time the acculturation and defense of Okinawan particularities inside the nation. In 1921 Prince Hirohito (1901-1989) witnessed a martial arts exhibition in Shuri Castle with the participation of Funakoshi Gichin and Miyagi Chōjun. The following year Funakoshi held a karate performance at Japan’s First Physical Education Exhibition, gaining the attention of Kanō Jigorō (1860-1938). Kanō, founder of *judō* and member of the International Olympic Committee, went on to be a catalyzing figure in the successful introduction of karate to the Japanese mainland. Kano was decisive for the establishment of modern *budō* with the funding of the Kodokan in 1882. He nonetheless was far from the essentialist and ultra-nationalist views gradually coopting modern Japanese *budō* during the 20s and the 30s, which ultimately took on Japanese martial arts and its institutions.

Kodokan judo was instrumental in the formation of *budō*. The modern form of Japanese martial arts, of which judo served as prototype, had a two-sided character. On the one hand, *budō* incorporated such modern elements as the scientific investigation of the technique, the dan-kyu system, verbal instruction, and emphasis on character building. On the other hand, *budō* built upon practices of the old martial arts to which it was linked discursively. Kano’s conception of *budō* was neither narrowly nationalistic nor socially conservative. Kano both promoted the development of Western sports in Japan [...] He also opened the Kodokan to women who wished to study judo. As time passed, however, *budō* was appropriated by strident nationalist, who propagated an essentialist conception of Japan’s martial arts (Shun 1998: 171).

Equally, *judō* had a crucial role in the global dissemination of *budō*, intimately bound to the idea of moral education and its semi-religious function. Some decades later, karate would follow, in general terms, this scheme of international circulation. On the other hand, besides judo, in pre-war times, famous karate masters in mainland kept repeated contacts with *aikido* (“the art of peace”), a martial art deeply tied to political

nationalism and the religious idea of purification. *Aikidō* was developed by Ueshiba Morihei (1883-1969), who pertained to the *Ōmoto-kyō* sect of *Shintō* derived new religions. Still, at this point, it is important to clearly discern that modern *budō* was not a direct translation of Japanese ultranationalism.

The transformation of the samurai *bujustu*, martial techniques, and *bushido* (“way of the warrior”), moral precepts, into the core of the flourishing modern nation Japan was not a natural development but the result of the intermingling of tradition with the conjectural moment and the programmatic envision of particular interest groups:

De esta manera, puede decirse que el aumento de la importancia de las artes marciales japonesas en el sistema educativo y la unificación en una organización centralizada de su enseñanza y su práctica, generan una nueva modalidad histórico-morfológica de *budō* japonés: un *budō unificado*, en el que las diferencias estilísticas surgidas a lo largo de la historia vuelven a pasar a un segundo plano, subordinado, con respecto al de *kendō* y *judō* o, morfológicamente hablando, al eje «truncal» de artes marciales con armas e inermes; un *budō*, que es fruto de su conversión en un instrumento más de la política y que funciona, desde la perspectiva ideológica, como *budō nacional*, y desde la perspectiva práctica, político-organizativa, como *budō estatal*. (Pita 2014: 323).<sup>217</sup>

Thus, in the period between the Meiji reforms and WWII, Japanese martial arts turned into an instrument of modern politics. *Budō* accelerated from a national athletic-pedagogical strategy at the beginning of the century to a significant component of the Japanese fascist-imperialistic ideology with the advent of the war at the Pacific (Pita 2014: 316-328). However, the totalitarian militaristic cooptation of school sports and combat systems and their allegorization as national representatives was not a privative characteristic of Japan.<sup>218</sup> It worth mentioning one of the most influential books liking the

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<sup>217</sup> Translation: “Thus, it can be said that the increase of the importance of Japanese martial arts in the educational system and the unification of its teaching and practice in a centralized organization, generate a new historical-morphological modality of Japanese *budō*: a unified *budō*, in which the stylistic differences that have arisen throughout history take second place once again, subordinated, with respect to that of *kendō* and *judō* or, morphologically speaking, to the “core” axis of martial arts with weapons and defenses; a *budō*, which is the result of its conversion into another instrument of politics and that functions from the ideological perspective, as *national budō*, and from the practical, political-organizational perspective, as *state budō*.” (Pita 2014: 323)

<sup>218</sup> Take for example the extremely popular German heavyweight boxer Max Schmeling (1905-2005) whose fights against the U.S. Afro-American champion star Joe Louis (1914-1981) embedded the national contents and military supremacies between the two states prior WWII. In 2016 I published an article exploring the boxer as incarnator of the national body and values, in this case the Revolutionary Mexico versus the Capitalist U.S. See González de la Fuente (2016).

image of the samurai and Japan in the West, the best seller of Inazō Nitobe (1862-1933) *Bushido. The soul of Japan* (1900). Originally written in English with the intention to disseminate the ethic code of samurai for educational purposes, Nitobe's words were extra imbued with imperialistic nuances in western languages early translations. Such re-interpretations reflected thus the European and North American militaristic ideologies (Rodriguez Navarro 2008; Pita 2014: 358).

Therefore, in these transitional stages not a unified voice, but on the contrary many perspectives coexisted inside the field of Japanese martial arts organizational architecture. Unfortunately, nevertheless, the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai was progressively appropriated by extreme national-militarism, with a notable acceleration of the course by the geopolitical escalate that preceded WWII.<sup>219</sup> Take, for example, Miyagi Chōjun, representative of the Naha-Kume karate traditions with their notable Chinese influences. Miyagi had also made numerous visits to Japanese Universities (Kyoto, Tokyo, Kansai, Ritsumeikan among others) between the end of the 20s and the 30s to teach and give karate lectures, participating at the same time in Butokukai activities. He successfully registered his *Gōjū-ryū* style at the Butokukai in 1933 –the first time that karate was accepted by the establishment, and in 1935 he was the first Okinawan master to be granted with an official title by the Japanese institution. Just before the commencement of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), in 1936, Miyagi, who had been traveling extensively to Fujian and Hawaii, arrived at Shanghai. The Japanese Consul petitioned him to demonstrate his karate to the Okinawan and Japanese community. Furthermore, he signed a statement of friendship (*tankazu*) with the local martial arts associations, which stated: “Wishing for peace between China and Japan through ken,” in other words, by first or martial arts (*Okinawa, the Birthplace* 2017: 141).

In the 1930s, despite the Butokukai recognition and the migration of Okinawan masters to Tokyo and Kansai, who were teaching at Universities and police departments, karate was still perceived as a peripheral and uncivilized art due to its Okinawan origins and lack of systematization. In order to be a proper form of *budō*, karate required not only

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<sup>219</sup> Just the naming of the martial arts institution as *dai*, “the big”, “the great”, conveys the message of building and imperial Japan by expansion

new systems of teaching, dojo etiquette, uniforms, technique names, grades but even more importantly, an unequivocal and righteous name.

### **3.1.1. From Kingdom to Prefecture, from Ryūkyūan Martial Arts to “The Way of the Empty hand”**

The year of 1936 witnessed the famous meeting of Okinawan masters, a reunion called *ex profeso* to resolve the matter of the karate name. The episode took place at the Shōwa Kaikan (“meeting hall”) in Naha, sponsored by Ryūkyū Shimpō newspapers on October 25<sup>th</sup>. This day was designated by the Okinawan Prefecture in 2005 as the commemorative *Karate no Hi* (“Karate Day”). There is a trend in karate historiography, that permeated popular history, which marks this reunion as the event where a dramatical change for the Okinawan martial art was decided: to alter the very characters with which “karate” was written. The original kanji of “karate” was modified, preserving the pronunciation but altering the meaning. It shifted from “karate” (*tode* 唐手) literally “Chinese hand” to “karate” (*karate* 空手) meaning “empty hand”. Furthermore, the particle *dō* (“way” 道) was added. Of the many actualizations introduced to Okinawan karate, this is one bears the utmost symbolic relevance because it illustrates without paramount the political uses of karate. Besides, it is a commonplace to interpret that the meeting decision over the name demonstrates that Okinawan karate was mostly a Chinese martial art reflecting the natural affinities of Ryūkyūan culture.

Actually, the scene of martial arts in the Ryūkyūs was far richer and complex. In previous chapters, I have explored how the naturalized Chineseness of Okinawan culture must be correctly pondered and interpreted as a result of historical developments and a trialogic state diplomatic policy involving the Ryūkyūs, Japan and China. On the other hand, as many were the voices in Japanese *budō* during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were in Okinawan karate. Thus, it is not accurate to underline the 1936 reunion as the historical moment in which karate was unwillingly Japanized by outside forces. As we have seen in the previous section, many modifications were being introduced to karate since the early days of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, three decades before. In truth, some Okinawan karate masters like Hanashiro Chōmo (1869–1945) were scribing karate as “empty hand”

long ago. Chōmo, a pro-Japanese Okinawan karate master, is credited for having pioneered the writing of karate as “the empty hand” in a 1905 publication named “Karate Kumite.”<sup>220</sup> Nevertheless, Funakoshi Gichin is attributed with popularizing the term due to his ascendance in the karate clubs of the main Japanese universities (at the Imperial University of Tokyo or Waseda, for example). The success of Funakoshi’s written works, especially those linking karate to Zen, like the renowned *Karate-Dō Kyo-han* (1935) also explain why he is considered the father of modern karate and thus of “the empty hand” term. Before the 30s Funakoshi used to regard karate as *tode*, but it seems that under the influence of his students at the Keio University karate club, he decided to alter this custom. According to Guttman and Thompson:

In March 1929, members of Keio’s karate club visited a priest of the Rinzaï sect of Zen Buddhism and listened attentively as he lectured them on the Buddhist concept of emptiness. They were especially impressed by the phrase “empty hand,” a phrase that can also be pronounced “karate.” The very next month, on the fifth anniversary of the founding of their club, they announced a change in the way they wrote the characters for “karate.” Henceforth, “karate” was written as “empty hand” rather than “Chinese hand.” The students prevailed upon Funakoshi to adopt this new appellation (Guttman, Thompson 2001: 147).

Apparently, many Okinawans were prone to the use of *tode* or “Chinese hand” to refer “karate”. Still, lots of others only spoke of *te*, meaning fist or technique. The idea of equaling karate, or more precisely the Ryūkyūan martial arts of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, to *tode*, even acknowledging the huge ascendance of Chinese martial arts, is a posteriori historical fabrication. We must remember that in Okinawa there was a considerable variety of martial arts styles, all but standardized and very asymmetrically practiced, including the manifold of *kobudō* weapons and techniques. Therefore, reduce the Ryūkyūan martial arts to a supposed unified Chinese *tode* is a misleading assumption that does not represent the whole picture of the understandings and uses of the art in Okinawa those days. Frequently the nickname of Sakugawa *Tode* Kanga (1786-1867), a distinguished master, is alleged to justify the dominance of *tode* in karate; however, it is worth recalling how Matsumura Sōkon (1806-1894), an equally transcendental personality for Ryūkyūan martial arts, was nicknamed *bushi*. Hence nothing must lead us

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<sup>220</sup> “Karate Kumite” was a textbook for teaching karate at schools. Chomo volunteered to the Japanese army along with Kentsu Yabu (1866-1937), another Okinawan master, nicknamed *Gunso* (“Sergeant”), and one of the very few Okinawans that participated in the first Sino-Japanese war (1894-1895).

to conclude that Sakugawa alias is nothing but partial evidence. Concerning the debate about karate writing in 1936 meeting the Prefectural book *Okinawa, the Birthplace of Karate* appropriately characterizes it as a “symposium at which the standardization of the characters used to write ‘Karate’ is discussed” (2017: 178). Therefore, standardization as a means of modernization commanded the reforms of Okinawan karate, above Japanization understood as a core imperative. Nevertheless, there was an evident trend of nation-building that affected karate as it affected all Japanese martial arts, prime politico-cultural instruments (we will delve pronto into this). Let us attend again to Chōjun Miyagi’s words, probably the most influential karate instructor still residing in Okinawa at that time. Despite being credited as a traditionalist, and unlike other masters such for example Kyoda Juhatsu (1887-1968)<sup>221</sup>, the *Gōjū-ryū* founder, did not oppose the ongoing transformations:

I use the Kanji ‘Chinese Hand’ as most people do so. It has minor meaning. Those who want to learn karate from me come to my home and say: ‘Please teach me Tii or Te.’ So, I think people used to call ‘Tii’ or ‘Te’ for karate. I think ‘Karate’ is good in the meaning of the word. As Mr. Shimabukuro said, the name ‘Jujutsu’ was changed to ‘Judo.’ In China, in the old days, people called Hakuda or Baida for Chinese kungfu, Kenpo or Chuanfa. Like those examples, names change according to times. I think the name ‘Karate-Do’ is better than just ‘Karate.’ However, I will reserve decision on this matter, as I think we should hear other people’s opinions. We had a controversy on this matter at the meeting of Okinawa Branch of Dai Nippon Butokukai. We shelved this controversial problem. In the meantime, we, members of Okinawa Branch, use the name ‘Karate-Do’ written in Kanji as ‘The Way of Chinese Hand.’ Shinkokai [a karate promotion association]<sup>222</sup> will be formed soon, so we would like to have a good name. (Toyama 1960).

On the other hand, it is evident that the standardization of kanji for naming karate as “the way of the empty hand” was a politically induced decision to stress ultra-nationalistic views. With the advent of the second Sino-Japanese war (1937-1945), to officially support a martial way, karate-do, that read “the way of the Chinese hand” would have been unthinkable. In my opinion, the so-called “Meeting of the Masters” in 1936

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<sup>221</sup> “I am opposed to making a formal decision right now at this meeting. Most Okinawan people still use the word ‘Chinese Hand’ for karate, so we should listen to karate practitioners and karate researchers in Okinawa, and also we should study it thoroughly at our study group before making a decision.” (Toyama 1960: n.p.).

<sup>222</sup> We will later see that recently, in 2008, a new society for the promotion of Okinawa karate, gathering the most powerful individuals and federations, has been formed and named as Okinawa Dentokaratedō Shinkokai.

was more a pretext to politely communicate the Okinawan karateka a decision already done in higher instances, that is to foster the reforms of karate (new techniques, kata and terminology, etc.) and of course cut the most obvious Chinese reference, than a roundtable for them actually to discuss the issue. Not only a textual analysis of the minutes of the meeting points to that conclusion but the mere observation of the ‘special guests’ attending, of which the masters were, by the way, in a neat minority. Seven karate masters were called to the gathering; in contrast, bureaucrats and journalists amounted thirteen people: seven political, administrative, and military officers, plus six influential journalists. Among them the Vice Commander of the Regional Military Headquarters, the Chief of Okinawa Prefectural Police Affairs Section, the Chief of Okinawa Prefectural Security Section, the Supervisor of Physical Education of Okinawa Prefecture, the Director of Okinawa Prefectural Library, the Director the Prefectural Physical Education Board, the Ryūkyū Shimpō Newspaper President, its Chief Editor and its Director, and finally Nakasone Genwa (1895-1978), the ultimate organizer.

Nakasone was a karate researcher and book editor, well connected to politics, journalism, academia, and karate circles. In his youth, he moved to Tokyo involving in the Communist party activities, and by this reason, he suffered imprisonment from 1923 to 1927. Then he went back to Okinawa and began researching Okinawan culture and folklore – he had made a good friendship with Yanagita Kunio, and particularly karate (McKenna 2009: 71). After WWII, he was an influential politician funding the Democratic Alliance and the New Republican Party, advocating for the Okinawan independence from Japan and the EEUU during the military occupation. His last publication was a book entitled *From Okinawa to Ryūkyū* (1973). At the 1936 reunion, Nakasone practically concluded the dialogue on the karate naming by saying:

This will affect the growth and direction of karate-do throughout the entire nation. These youths recognize the term Toudi (Chinese Hand) for its historical significance. However, they believe karate-do will develop under its own steam. I think that the volume of youngsters practicing karate-do, and their actions, will influence karate-do’s future growth and direction. Toudi should be changed to karate (empty hand) as soon as possible. We must not only consider its preservation, but also its advancement. (McCarthy 1999b: 62).

I consider that Nakasone, moreover, taking into account his previous communist activities and his time in prison, was well aware of the rapid modernizing tendencies and the raising of the extreme right-wing in Japanese politics. The 1936 meeting must be

framed by the burgeoning Japanese nationalism and militaristic agenda in the Asian region. The seemingly simple adjustment of karate scripture served to obscure and dislocate the historic contacts of Okinawan martial arts with China and other East Asian territories. At the same time, it linked karate to the samurai spirit of *bushidō*, which was being touted as the quintessence of the Japanese nation. According to historian Stanislaw Meyer:

Being stereotyped as lazy and backward the Okinawans constantly struggled with social discrimination. All that the Japanese wanted to see in Okinawa was prostitutes, pork, potatoes and ‘barbarian’ customs of hand tattooing. Ryūkyūan high culture had no chance to capture the mind of the Japanese and apart from a small number of ethnologists, who had discovered in Ryūkyū traits of ancient Japan, no one was interested in Okinawa. Only karate possessed the potential to show a truly ‘Japanese’ (not to say ‘samurai’) face for Okinawa. And thus a ‘samuraized’ version of karate was introduced to the Japanese who discovered in it a foundry of the ‘Japanese spirit’ (*yamato damashii*) and incorporated it into the set of national representations. (Meyer 2008: 17-18).

Under my view, Nakasone decided to encourage a non-confronting approach that at the same time could serve to use karate as a device for Okinawan pride and cultural legitimacy in a context of notable discrimination; Nakasone wrote: “*Karate-do* is the *Budō* which is best at cultivating the new Japanese *bushidō* spirit.” (Tankosich 2006: 24).

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The next year, coinciding with the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese war (1937-1945), a turning point in the militarization of martial arts,<sup>224</sup> the first official Okinawan association for the promotion of karate led by Nakasone, the Okinawa Ken Karate Dō Shinko Kyokai, was formed and set the first rules for kata and grades unification. Twelve basic kata were created and publicized for new students. 1938 saw

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<sup>223</sup> With this subject I presented in June 2017 a paper entitled: “El karate como herramienta política en los inicios de la Era Showa. Genwa Nakasone: historiador, editor e ideólogo”, in the *VIII Simposi Internacional de Joves Investigadors en Traducció, Interpretació, Estudis Interculturals i Estudis d’Àsia Oriental*, held at the Universidad Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB).

<sup>224</sup> “The Manchurian Incident occurred in 1931 and hostilities between China and Japan came to a head with the second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45). In 1938, the “*Kokka Sōdōin-hō*” (National Mobilization Law) was sanctioned, and control by the militaristic government became more pervasive. When the “Edict of National Education” was promulgated in 1941, the term “gymnastics” (*taisō*) was replaced by “physical discipline” (*tairen*), and *Budō* was made compulsory for all students. In 1942, the Dai-Nippon Butokukai became an extra-governmental organization, and *jūkendō* (the “Way” of the bayonet) and *shageki-dō* (the “Way” of marksmanship) were added to educational programs to strengthen the war effort” (Uozumi 2010: 15).



the publication of *Karate-Dō Taikan* (Encyclopedia of Karate-do) a vast work of technical documentation featuring many photographic stills of Okinawan masters.

My contention is that one of the main aspirations of Nakasone and the recently born Okinawan Karate Promotion Division was to develop a counterbalance to the rapid spread and institutionalization of karate in Japan mainland, considerably built upon the Okinawan masters that had migrated by Tokyo and the Kansai area. Despite their renowned skills, the ethnic discrimination at the political and martial centers of bureaucratic power in Japan towards the Okinawans was undeniable. So was the potential danger of a neat rupture between Okinawan karate and Japanese karate that would leave behind the Ryūkyūan ways, a sad reality perpetuated until nowadays.<sup>225</sup> In 1935 when the Dai-Nippon Butoku Kai recognized and granted the first three master titles only Miyagi was Okinawan born.<sup>226</sup>

Despite the fact that many Okinawans were already teaching karate in mainland Japan at that time. In fact Konishi and Ueshima (ethnic Japanese) were students of Okinawan karate masters [...] Thus, we better understand the apparent paradox of Konishi acting in 1938 as head of the grading committee in Dai-Nippon Butokukai's karate and granting renshi ranks in 1939 to 23 karate masters, among them his former masters Funakoshi and Mabuni [...] a blatant majority of those promoted to renshi were ethnic Japanese and (e.g. Otuska Hironori, founder of Wado ryu), and many influential ethnic Okinawan masters were not included. (Sánchez-García 2018: 176).

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<sup>225</sup> The preoccupation for the inclusion of all karate styles stands out as particularly visionary in Nakasone writings, because still today only one of the traditional Okinawan karate styles is recognized by the Japan Karate-do Association, The World Karate Federation and therefore the International Olympic Committee. That Nakasone was attending and somehow envisioning into the future the historical circumstances of Japanese politics and the delicate situation of Okinawa and karate come out manifestly in *Karate Kenkyu* ("Karate Research, 1934), a collection of short essays edited by him and written by leading karate masters. *Karate Kenkyu*, that was initially intended to be a monthly magazine, defined its goals in the first pages of the publication by Nakasone's hand as follows: "1. To be a mechanism for comprehensive research for the purpose of the development of our country's *karate-dō*, with all 'styles' included. 2. To be a mechanism for technical research for those who train in *karate dō*, and, at the same time, to be a mechanism for their mental/spiritual cultivation. 3. To be a mechanism for cordial communication between *karate-ka* 4. *Karate kenkyu* shall also carry materials regarding other *budō*, forms of exercise, etc., that ought to serve as both direct and indirect sources of reference for *karate-ka*." (Tankosich 2006 :23-24).

<sup>226</sup> Other sources declare that this title, *kyoshi* ("teaching expert" or "advanced master") the second highest honoring rank possible, was conceded to Miyagi in 1937, after a demonstration at the Dai-Nippon Butoku Kai (Japan martial virtue association) festival (*butokusai*), becoming the first karate master to be awarded with the official title. (*Okinawa, the Birthplace* 2017: 138).



*Figure 17 - A karate demonstration at Shuri Castle in 1937 by male and female students of the Shuri City Elementary School. Karate had entered the Okinawan schools in the first decade of the 20th century. Source: Nakasone Genwa, Karate dō Taikan (1938).*

During the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, karate became a valuable tool for the authorities in modernizing Okinawa, through the school system, in a context of profound nationwide cultural and political changes. Those transformations were part of a great civilizing strategy to convert Japan in a modern nation-state vis-à-vis with western empires, and under this scheme, language was a major concern. The standardization of karate name in Okinawa anticipated an acrimonious debate on Okinawan language that was about to explode in 1940. The polemic raised in a sociolinguistic sense, in other words, about the roles of Japanese and Okinawan language for situating the Prefecture and its imperial subjects inside the nation. The Sino-Japanese War shaped intensively the politics of the time regarding identity and language at the margins of the nation, which beyond the Ryūkyūs also included Taiwan and Korea:

Were in the midst of calls for the strict enforcement of ‘*kokugo* (national language=Japanese)’ as part of the movement to turn the populace into imperial subjects. Every corner of Okinawa was plastered with posters saying ‘Standard

Japanese [for] the whole family!’ and at schools, students who spoke Okinawan were forced to wear a ‘dialect placard (*hōgen fuda*)’ by way of punishment. (Oguma 2014: 108).

The starting point of the Okinawan language controversy was a visit to the islands by members of the Folk Art Association and International Tourism Association, who held a meeting with business people, cultural elites, and prefectural officers. There the guests complained about the overemphasis on the neglect of the Ryūkyūan language and culture by the reformists, and raised arguments that amalgamated tourism, tradition, beauty and taste concerns:

Yanagi stated such things as: ‘I am not opposed to the use of Standard Japanese, but it would not do to neglect the language of the Ryūkyūs for that reason,’ ‘I would like you actively to equip Shuri and Naha as tourism cities,’ and ‘it is regrettable there are no souvenirs with a richly Okinawan air.’ Furthermore, staff from the Tourism Association forwarded such opinions as: ‘We want to preserve the traditional beauty and characteristics which look beautiful from tourists’ point of view,’ ‘It seems that you are promoting Standard Japanese, but frankly speaking, aren’t you going a bit too far?’ ‘In order to give full play to regional characteristics, in terms of taste, for example, what we want you to prohibit is the [concrete] fence below Shuri Castle,’ and ‘The lack of hotels is also inconvenient.’ (Oguma 2014: 115).

In later sections, we will see the ongoing creation of a tourist niche based in Okinawa karate that resonates strongly with these early developments. Continuing with the question of language, by the reasons presented above, the disposal of karate as “the Chinese hand” cannot be explained in naïve terms, that is, the coerced conversion of an all-Okinawa unified understanding about the martial art image and features. Nevertheless, it is also honest to acknowledge that this linguistic turn encapsulated the modernization and “Japanization” of Okinawan karate. The “empty hand” label introduced a religious allusion to Zen and the ideological agenda of modern *budō*. At the same time, it explains the little consideration that the karate styles developed in Japan generally allocate to *kobudō*, the use of karate weapons. Therefore, ultimately the rewriting of the kanji was the rewriting of a tradition to inculcate the Japanese nationalist spirit and the scientific-sportive evolutionary point of view upon the Okinawan heritage. Funakoshi wrote:

Now that Japan has become a nation of the World – some even say a nation of the first rank- it is no longer fitting to use ‘kara’ (‘China’) in the name of this uniquely Japanese Martial art. [...] Once one has perceived the infinity of forms and elements in the universe, one returns to emptiness, to the void. In other words, emptiness is none than the true form of the universe [...] karate alone explicitly

states the basis of all martial arts. Form equals emptiness; emptiness equals form. The use of the character 'kara' ('empty') in karate is indeed based in this principle. (Funakoshi 1996: 24-25).

By Funakoshi's statement, we get further signs of the western influence over karate Japanization. The technical rewritings of karate often included substituting old notions of body energetics with modern science theories about body functions as mechanisms similar to those of industrial production. Manuals of the time in which hips, elbows, shoulders and other parts of the body appear to work as gearwheels are a sample of this. Hence, many principles of western epistemology and sports optimization were adapted to Japanese martial arts like karate but covered with *bushidō* ideology. This procedure was known in Japan as *wakon yosai* or "Japanese spirit, Western technology".

Even the so-called Japanization, karate was a potential source for Okinawan self-esteem (manifested by Funakoshi's words above: "karate alone explicitly states the basis of all martial arts."), thanks to the crescent attention of influential individuals and the permeation of the Okinawan art in mainland popular mind. After WWII, karate popularity in Japan was going to bloom, and at the same time, its duality as a *budō* non-*budō* art accentuated by the concurrence of new developments and old antagonisms. Therefore, either as resistance or acculturation, karate bond together, by means of positive or negative dialectics, Japaneseness and Okinawanesness. This ambivalent feature of karate has not vanished in our contemporaneity, neither the tensions over the discipline contents and definition.

### 3.1.2. In which Ways is Karate(dō) Japanese? *Bushidō*, *Nihonjinron* and Postwar Karate in the First Wave of Martial Arts Globalization.

*Pero los objetos del mundo social, como lo indiqué, pueden ser percibidos y expresados de diversas maneras, porque siempre comportan una parte de indeterminación y de imprecisión y, al mismo tiempo, un cierto grado de elasticidad semántica.*

*Cosas Dichas*, Pierre Bourdieu.

The Battle of Okinawa, lasting three months, was one of the WWII bloodiest encounters, popularly known as “The Typhoon of Steel” by the vast amount of projectiles that covered Ryūkyūan territory. It brought havoc and numerous disgraces to the southern islands. The colossal loss of lives that official sources account for up to 150.000 individuals, 1/4 of the total archipelago population at that time and 1/3 of the main island of Okinawa (Oguma 2014: 3).<sup>227</sup> The memory of the brutal pain and grief inflicted by the Japan-U.S. war encounter is still very alive in Okinawan soil and made daily evident by the mutilation caused by the 32 U.S. military bases occupying about the 19% percent of the territory.<sup>228</sup>

Naturally, the Okinawan death count included karate masters, relatives and young apprentices, eroding, so to speak, the ‘natural’ line of cultural transmission, in a phenomenon that affected the whole socio-cultural sphere of the archipelago. Besides the irreplaceable loss of human lives, karate masters’ homes, dojos and clubs destruction supposed the loss of large amounts of martial arts culture-related possessions: weapons, objects, literature, and many precious assets; another case of the unspeakable destruction and obliteration that WWII with its horrors brought to Okinawa and karate.

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<sup>227</sup> “Some 12,000 U.S. troops lost their lives. There is no other place so small in area that yielded so many U.S. combat casualties. The enormity of that number can be appreciated when compared to the 55,000 dead from the decade-long Vietnam War. By contrast, Japanese military casualties totalled 94,000[...] The number of dead among Okinawan inhabitants [...] was not only due to the fighting having taken place on a small island with a concentrated population: there were also many people whose death was due to having been mobilised as rear-gūard support for the Japanese military, or having been massacred by the Japanese or U.S. forces.” (Oguma 2014: 3).

<sup>228</sup> The numbers of the military occupation are breathtaking. Okinawa has the world’s highest density of U.S. bases, representing almost the 74% percent of U.S. bases in Japan. The 10% of all overseas U.S. military personnel is stationed in Okinawa. (Oguma 2014: 3).

The scarcity of prewar karate paraphernalia also signifies the struggles for inheriting the masters' possessions by his disciples. One salient example is again Miyagi Chōjun's *Gōjū-ryū*. As a result of the war, two daughters and a son of Miyagi perished, among many familiars, friends, and karate students. His home and belongings were consumed by fire. The founder of *Gōjū-ryū* survived, but he was not going to live much longer. Although he went back to teach at the police academy now in the old Butokuden building in Naha, he was affected by a health condition, and finally died of a heart attack in 1953. Short before his passing, Miyagi's senior students had formed the Gōju-ryū Shinkō Kai to promote and further modernize the karate style.<sup>229</sup> The remaining founder's memorabilia: uniform, belt, training tools, scrolls, statues, etc. was disjointed, with the family acceptance, among different prominent students, who claimed the objects as sources of legitimacy. Others without relevant material items in their power argued a special personal relationship to Miyagi in the form of more training hours or the transmission of secret theory and principles. From this point, many schools and *Gōjū-ryū* factions developed. One of the most potent lineages was the Jundokan of Miyazato Eichī (1922-1999), who placed the Busaganashi/ Marshal Tian statue, held in such high esteem by Miyagi, at his dojo. Recall that in the second chapter we have seen how, over the years, the Marshal Tian idol has acquired a unique status for representing the founder's style, even karate itself. Today many copies had been made by schools outside the Jundokan branch, one of them placed at the Oki-no-gū Shintō Shrine in Naha.

Reproducing many features of the case mentioned above, the institutional architecture of postwar karate, both in Okinawa and Japan, is one of the multiple and extremely complex organizations and federations, forming, allying, dividing, and segregating in a routine that extends to our days. Instead of untangling such mazes, this section addresses some reflections on the representational status of karate as an iconic expression of Japanese culture, following its fast worldwide spread. To do so, nonetheless, I will begin by taking a small glimpse into 2017.

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<sup>229</sup> According to the prefectural book on karate "It is highly unlikely that Miyagi would have agreed to their plans, as he was a true traditionalist and strongly opposed to the kyu/dan grade system upon which modern forms of karate are based" (*Okinawa, the Birthplace* 2017: 151). However, we must also recall that Miyagi was the first karate master to register his style and be awarded with a modern title by the *Butoku Kai*.

On October 25, 2016, 3973 people gathered in Kokusai Dori, the main tourist street of Naha, Okinawa's capital city, to carry out the "Karate Day Anniversary Festival" and beat the Guinness World Record of "simultaneous karate demonstration with the largest number of participants."<sup>230</sup> The attempt coincided with the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1936 Masters Meeting, a date designated as "The World Karate Day" by the Prefecture of Okinawa. All around the world, karateka, from multiple nationalities, were targeted to participate in the celebration, which consequently received international echo. The massive demonstration also served to supply the opening and closing footage of the upcoming NHK World-Japan documentary series "Japanology Plus" episode entirely dedicated to Okinawan Karate, aired on 9 February 2017.<sup>231</sup>

Nevertheless, to which extent is it accurate to speak about Okinawan karate in terms of Japanology? Japanology etymologically comprises a double meaning: i) the study and science of "the Japanese" as a topic – from the Greek suffix -log; and ii) the discourse about "the Japanese" as a collection of narrations – from -logos. Ergo Japanology has been shaped by the cultural nationalism ideology embedded in *nihonjinron* ("theories about the Japanese") and *nihonbunkaron* ("discourse about the Japanese culture"). According to Oguma, who challenges commonly accepted views on the matter, the belief in the Japanese as a homogenous group is not so much the result of prewar Japan when the discourse of The Great Japanese Empire relied upon the possibility of a multiethnic nation, as from postwar Japan when revised historiography settled the theory and myth of the ethnic homogeneity of the nation (Oguma 2002).<sup>232</sup> From this standpoint, a good part of the Japanese anthropology and sociology has dedicated many efforts to deconstruct the *nihonjinron* ideology of homogeneity, heading to:

a depiction of contemporary Japan as a multiethnic and stratified society where class, culture, and ethnic differences play a significant role. The displacing of the homogeneity paradigm to a diversity framework has thus given rise to the questioning of the monolithic and essentialist definition of Japanese identity

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<sup>230</sup> See Ryūkyū Shimpō (2016: n.p). The event succeeded in outperforming by large the previous achievement in India (2013) with 809 people. However, in 2018 India regains the record by carrying out a demonstration that included exclusively 5797 women commemorating the international Women's Day.

<sup>231</sup> It is noteworthy that this episode (season 2, number 31) is at the top ten of over 200 available in an unofficial collection of Japanology Plus that can be found on the web; thus, demonstrating the capacity of karate to project a global image of Japan.

<sup>232</sup> "After the rise in anthropology and historiography of the homogeneous nation theory and the collapse of the prewar mixed nation theory, there was nothing left to prevent the myth of ethnic homogeneity from taking root. Japan came to be viewed as an isolated, remote and peaceful island nation, in which a homogeneous nation had lived from time immemorial" (Oguma 2002: 316).

forged in the ideological narrative of the *Nihonjinron* ('discourse on Japaneseness') literature. (Guarné, Yamashita 2015: 57).

*Nihonjinron* takes part in a scheme where partisan interpretations of history, otherwise managed by all nation-states, are exploited to erect and sanction the existence of precise leading and all-encompassing representational devices. Concurrently *nihonjinron* has been subject to an extensive diffusion by the worldwide popular mind, being reproduced as an esterotipized practice. The boom of post-war Japaneseness was initiated by the 70's economic miracle in Japan. The fascination of the new Japanese syncretic modernity and the global re-encounter with the Other encouraged the second wave in the creation of a Japanese cultural nationalism (Befu 1993; Sakai 1997; Guarné 2017).

Unmistakably Japanese martial arts have been placed among other samurai class performing arts as distinct elements in constructing and perceiving *nihonjinron* discourses, first in the transitioning narrative between Tokugawa Japan and the political construction of the Meiji nation-state by the intercourse of the political, economic and intellectual elites. When the horrors of Japanese fascism and WWII were being left behind by the passing of time, and the rebuild of the country, martial arts and the appeal of the philosophical-aesthetical complex of bushidō rose again as a major component of the *nihonjinron* theories, this time cleansed from totalitarian deviations.

Post-war karate cannot be understood without attending to the radical shift in Japan's situation in the global sphere. After WWII, Japan became a de facto occupied territory under the exigencies of the U.S., and the dismantling of the imperial political ideology began. The practice and the mere use of the term *budō* in schools or physical activities were prohibited by the allied forces (Pita 2014: 327) as a result of their practical and ideological involvement with prewar Japan ultra-nationalism. Sports, nonetheless, were globally reshaped in the aftermath of WWII as tools for pacification and democratization. Therefore, in Japan an increased de-militarized re-sportization of martial arts became the central opening for their gradual revitalization during the 50s:

El período que siguió directamente a la derrota de Japón en la guerra se caracterizó por una difusión del deporte y de los principios «democráticos» de vida, como mismo los períodos bélico y prebélico se habían destacado por la ponderación del *budō* sobre el deporte y la expansión del totalitarismo militarista. En las nuevas condiciones históricas la *deportivización* se convirtió en la vía



social hacia la reivindicación «democrático-pacífica» del *bujutsu* tal y como a finales de Meiji había sido el camino de su adaptación a la modernización «civilizadora». Pero para *redepportivizar* el *bujutsu* había que trabajar tanto en la transformación de su denominación como de su imagen. (Pita 2014: 328-329).<sup>233</sup>

By its part karate in Okinawa, which was thoroughly occupied by the U.S military and ceased to pertain to the national territory of Japan between 1945 and 1972, was steadily prospering. By means of the U.S military personnel, and especially since the Vietnam War, karate rapidly grows in popularity as a Japanese martial arts icon and colonizes the conqueror psyche. Under the U.S. administration, the Okinawan martial art was used again as a political tool, a cultural weapon for encouraging Ryūkyūan pride. It was in 1956 that the name “Okinawa Karate-do” appeared for the first time (*Okinawa, the Birthplace* 2017: 179). Stephen Chan, who has characterized the martial arts as “hybrid totems” (2011), discerns how around that time U.S. practitioners in the archipelago began to value Okinawan particularities in contrast to the Japanese interpretations, hence fostering and impacting the development of the art: “in Okinawa, with all its U.S. bases, had been influenced in turn by the American airmen who had become devotees of the ‘Okinawan’ Way.” (Chan 2011: 187).

Amidst the numerous discontents that the construction of bases, displacement of peoples, military presence, and no few cases of abuses towards the inhabitants of the archipelago, karate provided an intercultural vehicle for the positive and peaceful encounter between Okinawans and U.S. nationals. On the other side, put between the cultural pride and the intercultural dialogue based on peace culture, karate contributed indirectly to justify, or even partially conceal, the military occupation as a process of liberation and reparation from the Japanese excesses. Miyahira Katsuyuki provides an excellent analysis of the rhetoric of peace as a warrant of U.S occupation and the geostrategic alliance with Japan that has in Okinawa a hot sport. He identifies many of the prevalent discourses about peace in post-war Okinawa, that drawing on metaphors put

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<sup>233</sup> Translation: “The period directly following Japan's defeat in the war was characterized for the dissemination of sport and the “democratic” principles of life, just as the war and pre-war periods had been highlighted by the weighting of *budō* upon sport and the expansion of militaristic totalitarianism. In the new historical conditions, *sportization* became the social path towards the “democratic-pacific” claim of *bujutsu* in the same manner that at the end of Meiji it had been the path of their adaptation to the “civilizing” modernization. But in order to *re-sportize* *bujutsu* it was necessary to work on both the transformation of its name and its image.” (Pita 2014: 328-329).

peace necessarily into the future, always under threats of aggression, hence justifying readiness to fight, armament, and the occupation of the islands:

For the JOURNEY-WAR metaphor to be effective, a destination/goal must be set in the future, and the path to the destination is posed as something that is fraught with threats and dangers, which in turn necessitates constant struggle against them, even in peacetime. This line of reasoning is one of the ways in which constant armament continues to be justified in the eyes of a “nurturant provider” (Miyahira 2005: 32).

As can be seen, many parallels to karate arise from such discursive alliances. Martial arts training aligns with the requirement of weaponizing the body in times of peace in preparation for war. In the same manner, from my point of view, probably the idea of karate as a peasant Okinawan fighting method created to defend from the violent Satsuma samurai derives, or at least gained global dissemination, in the times of U.S. occupation. Ultimately it conveys the historical message of protecting the peaceful Okinawans from higher powers, either Japanese in the past or Chinese in the future. Postwar karate cultural images increased the extent and ideological range of its geopolitical functions, as we are about to see, even to unexpected limits by means of globalization and conflicts.

Besides the above reflections, it is worth noting that the Olympic flame for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics entered Japan on September 7<sup>th</sup> via Okinawa. Spotlighted by the media and adorned with mass demonstrations for five days, the arrival was a planned piece of the Japanese national rebuilding process after WWII. A propaganda movement that pinpointed the complicated geopolitics of Okinawa: “It encouraged the reversion movement by displaying the *hinomaru* (the Japanese flag) and promoted beautification movement as a means of modernization.” (Shimizu 2011: 53). This very same year, one of the most prominent karate associations of Okinawa, the Okinawa Karate Dō Renmei (1956), was dissolved and reformed as the Zen Okinawa Karate Dō Renmei. Although, in this case, the character reading “Zen” means “whole” or “complete,” the religious allusion is challenging to ignore. The chairman of both the old and the renewed karate association was Nagamine Shōshin (1907-1997), who advocated for the maxim “karate

and zen as one” (*ken zen ichinyo*).<sup>234</sup> Nagamine, nonetheless, was a firm defender of the practices of Okinawan karate centered on forms (*kata*) instead of combat (*kumite*), the main focus of modern-sportive developments in Japan mainland. The performances of Japaneseness in Okinawa during the American occupation, like those concerned with the 1964 Olympics, were not unambiguous, unanimous, nor historically prescriptive, as we will be going to see in later sections.

The increased worldwide appeal of karate was accompanied by a dialogical intensification of the Okinawan martial art fame in Japan. At the end of the '60s, the country was experiencing a remarkable economic development and the renaissance of its national pride, leaving behind immediate postwar negative images. *Bushidō* re-emerged as an honorable frame of reference for a new generation of Japanese. Mishima Yukio (1925-1970) and his book *Hagakure nyumon* (“Introduction to Hagakure”, 1967) were essential elements for the repairing of Japanese martial arts popular image with actualized attachments. Not by chance, Mishima’s work was translated into English in 1977 with the title “The Way of the Samurai: Yukio Mishima on Hagakure in Modern Life”. After training in *kendō* (“the way of the sword”) and *iaidō* (“the art of drawing the sword”) was precisely in 1967 that Mishima started his training in karate at the Japan Karate Society. In 1970, shortly before his suicide in the *Mishimajiken* or “the Mishima incident”, the literary star participated in the 13<sup>th</sup> All-Japan Karate Championships at the Budōkan in Tokyo. Mishima was a capital figure in restoring and popularizing the international image

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<sup>234</sup> Nagamine recommended to “Include zazen (Zen training in a sitting position) in karate practice for further mind training and understanding of the essence of karate do and Zen as one”. (Nagamine 2011: 30). Years later, in 1996 Nagamine travelled to Hawaii to receive appreciation by the 84th Dharma Successor of Rinzai Zen for “his Zen realization – *Ken Zen Inchinryo*”; there the Okinawan master gave his well-known speech “Okinawa Karate and World Peace”. Here are some illustrative passages of his talk: “Karate-do is definitely a martial way, and its identity lies in *do* or principles. Any martial art without proper training of the mind turns into beastly behavior. Martial way training is a process to put forth effort to reach an eventual state of “emptiness.” What you attain through this training is called *butoku* (principles of warriors). [...] I truly believe that is the duty of Okinawa karate people [...] to proudly transfer karate-do to future generations. [...] Okinawans prefer or accept the life style of being tricked and being taken advantage of, rather than hurting other people or playing trick on them. This saying expresses the typical Okinawan spirit of being simple and pure. [...] I believe the *kokoro* or spirit of Okinawa is one which shows an extreme non-resisting resistance action, beyond our imagination, when someone is cornered and/or when standing up against violence.[...] We, the people of Ryūkyū, have learned the importance of human life through the banning of immolation. We also have learned human piety from the governance of religion and politics together. Moreover, we have created a spirit of mutual assistance. Through these lessons, island people, in peace without any weapons, have formulated an unprecedented and incomparable philosophy of *karate ni sente nashi* or “first that does not strike first.” (2000: 158-163).

of *bushidō*, now a mass phenomenon, formerly a hideous and deplorable referent (Pita 2014: 331-332). Henceforth, Japanese martial arts were again together with practices like tea ceremony or *haiku* among the Japanese cultures “so often described as ‘mysterious aesthetic spirituality’ by the Western media” (Ikegami 2008: 221)<sup>235</sup>, constituted one of the prevailing modes for the global dissemination of Japanese representational images and their underlying ideologies.

Despite karate worldwide demand and *budō* restoration, during the '70s and 80's the Okinawan martial art continued to be trapped in a center-periphery duality by cause of his origins. Overseas, karate was the main icon of Japanese martial arts, even of Asian arts themselves, as witnessed by the numerous films that used the word “karate” in their productions, although they featured Chinese or Korean martial arts. There was a period in which karate, martial arts or kung fu were near-synonyms in many West countries pop culture.<sup>236</sup> In this scheme, the U.S. cultural industries irradiated karate and East Asian Martial arts through the Globe.

Although the arrival of martial arts to the U.S. dates back to the first Asian diasporas at the end of the 19th century, its widespread expansion occurred after the end of World War II. This is a geopolitical scenario defined by the multiple U.S. military interventions in Asia, the anxieties of the Cold War and the threat of Asian communism. This framework necessarily conditioned the perception of martial arts by way of the discovery of an exotic and dangerous other, yet fascinating, that threatened national security. The form and circumstances of this cultural contact, commanded primarily by conflict as a form of socialization,<sup>237</sup> is critical to accurately interpret the scope and

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<sup>235</sup> Ikegami categorizes martial arts into ‘tacit modes of communication’ that can overcome body-mind duality by aesthetic practices “beyond reasoned logical investigation or linguistic articulation”: “The emphasis on tacit modes of knowledge and communication is a distinctive feature of the Japanese Performing arts that attained virtually meta-canonical status [...] Zeami’s prescription of ideal performance with an empty mind was not exceptional. Various performing arts, including martial arts, developed a similar ideal. Although some arts, such as the tea ceremony and *Nō* drama had developed more articulated ideologies with a clear connection to Buddhist ontology, others transmitted a similar understanding of physical discipline and spirituality as ‘taken for granted naturalness’ through their practices.” (Ikegami 2008: 221,225)

<sup>236</sup> Think, for instance, of Bruce Lee’s first Hong Kong movie *The Big Boss* (1971) translated in Spain as *Karate a Muerte en Bangkok*; or the much later American movie “The Perfect Weapon” (1991) where the main character fights the Korean mafia in a Korean neighborhood with the martial arts he learned there, in a dojo whose main sign announces “karate” in large letters.

<sup>237</sup> For a classical reference of conflict as a primary form of socialization with philosophical echoes that may make us think of the so-called non duality of Asian thought see Simmel (1904): “Conflict itself is the resolution of the tension between the contraries. That it eventuates in peace is only a single, specially

meaning of martial arts narratives in U.S. culture. The martial arts were, for many U.S. soldiers, which in high numbers were stationed in Okinawa or using the bases situated there as gateways to the wars on Korea (1950-53) and Vietnam (1955-1975), a way to sublimate the violent encounter with otherness and thus reconfigure their identities. This vis-à-vis confrontation also awakened in U.S. personnel a genuine taste for martial arts, for which they were accepted as positive physical and spiritual practices worthy of being taken “back home”. A significant number of ex-combatants began to open schools in the U.S., the first karate dojo dating from 1964, and the martial arts began to capture the massive public interest, on many occasions with re-readings of a nationalistic nature that gave rise to the self-called American Martial Arts.

On the other hand, martial arts were also assimilated by the counter-culture and politico-cultural resistance of the time, evidencing the complexities of its manifestations as members of the global imaginary. From the late 1960s, a period of tremendous social upheaval in the U.S., Asian-American and African-American minorities developed new cultural references based on the archetype of the Asian martial artist and the otherness of his physical, ethical and philosophical characteristics. A conspicuous example is the inclusion of martial arts into the formative activities of the Black Panthers movement and the many cross-pollinations between martial arts cinema and Blaxploitation genres, that depicted a cultural engagement with a wider and more extensive scope.<sup>238</sup> From this perspective, the martial arts represented a successful rupture of the epistemological, geopolitical and class domination axis, being able to be incorporated collectively as a positivist ideological fantasy, the empirical evidence of alternatives to the legitimate

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obvious and evident, expression of the fact that it is a conjunction of elements, an opposition, which belongs with the combination under one higher conception. This conception is characterized by the common contrast between both forms of relationship and the mere reciprocal indifference between elements. Repudiation and dissolution of social relation are also negatives, but conflict shows itself to be the positive factor in this very contrast with them; viz., shows negative factors in a unity which, in idea only, not at all in reality, is disjunctive.” (Simmel 1904: 490).

<sup>238</sup> “African American interest in the martial arts is ubiquitous in the contemporary United States. It can be seen in the burgeoning numbers of black youths enrolled in self-defense classes and in hip-hop culture. African Americans’ fascination with the martial arts cuts across artistic genres. The Wu Tang Clan, the rap group most responsible for bringing kung fu to the hip-hop community, markets classic films from Kung Fu Theater. The RZA, the founder of the Wu Tang Clan, for example, wrote the scores for Jim Jarmusch’s crime drama *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai* (1999) and Quentin Tarantino’s homage to Hong Kong kung fu films *Kill Bill, Vol. 1* (2003) and *Kill Bill, Vol. 2* (2004).” (Cha Jua 2008: 1999). Tarantino’s homage to kung fu in *Kill Bill*, nonetheless, takes part in Japan and U.S. soils. Actually, the main character, played by Uma Thurman travels to Okinawa to obtain a *katana* expressly manufactured by the hands of Hattori Hanzo, a character alluding to the famous 16<sup>th</sup> century Japanese samurai.

social order, imperialism and colonialism (Kato 2008; Cha Jua 2008; Farrer, Whalen Bridge 2011).

To sum up an additional layer of complexity, inside the global circulation of martial arts, karate turns out to be a central emblem for the reinstatement of the Japanese nation as a leading cultural power in the East Asian Region. In *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics* (2004: 84-85), Joseph S. Nye cites martial arts among one of the most valuable resources of Asian countries, especially Japan, for the exercise of soft power on an international level, thanks to their cultural appeal. Thus, given martial arts ascendancy over other cultures and societies, based on both spiritual principles and fascinating images, karate was an instrument to cement Japanese state efforts of cultural diplomacy in world politics. In later sections, I will take up current developments about these questions. For the moment, it is important to remark that in the postwar period, when martial arts were re-integrated into the corpus of cultural symbols that nourish Japan's soft power repository, karate was the principal and foremost.

Combining the conceptual and social trends mentioned above, since the 1960s, martial arts as a multiple and elastic vernacular culture began to colonize the global social imaginary on a large scale. Besides contributing to domination, discourses martial arts also conveyed messages undermining the prevailing status. They put into question both hierarchies and certain modes of substantial thought, not only through their own practices but primarily through its many cultural images in the movies (with notable appearances in James Bond films), books, comic books and the star system.<sup>239</sup> The enormous popularity that reached the martial arts cinema in the 70s cannot be explained without the charismatic presence of Bruce Lee leading the martial arts cultural craze. Lee first capitalized on karate to gain ascendance, and then introduced Chinese martial arts as a

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<sup>239</sup> "With the power of hindsight, the proclamation of a popular cultural revolution, which swept the world from Hong Kong, can be traced back to Bruce Lee's statement on *gung fu* (Cantonese spelling of kung fu) made in 1965 when the term was virtually unknown to the rest of the world. A few years prior to the official outbreak of the revolution in Hong Kong, Lee happened to be interviewed by the Twentieth Century Fox studio as part of the screen test for an actor skilled in the 'Oriental' martial arts. At this occasion, Lee in effect unleashed the power of ancient Chinese martial arts by removing the veil of hitherto kept secrecy: 'Well, gung fu is originated in China. It is the ancestor of karate and jujitsu. It's more of a complete system and it's more fluid.... (What's the difference between a gung fu punch and a karate punch?) A karate punch is like an iron bar - 'whack!' A gung fu punch is like an iron chain with an iron ball attached to the end, and it go[es] 'wang!' and it hurt[s] inside.' This screen test, which ultimately led Lee to his debut in Hollywood as Kato in *The Green Hornet* (1966-1967), was a by-product of his first appearance at a U.S. karate tournament." (Kato 2007 :9).

superior tradition, an opposing force against the not so distant Japanese hegemonic imperialism in East Asia, which actually had appropriated karate from its Chinese origins:

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The 80s saw the production of the extremely successful martial arts drama *The Karate Kid* (1984). The movie builds its argument on the controversy between the tough education of the Cobra Kai, American karate, and the fine ascetics and mastery of Mr. Miyagi, Okinawan born. The teachings of Mr. Miyagi, based on Miyagi Chōjun, the

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<sup>240</sup> For further statements of Bruce Lee asserting that karate came from China see Kato (2007: 20-21). The scholar supports the alleged appropriation of an originally Chinese Okinawan karate or *tode* by Japanese imperialism in the early 20th century, as demonstrated by the change of ideograms: "The official name change proclaimed the birth of karate-do, a newly incorporated national martial arts of Japan. Once karate had been converted into the disciplinary art of the imperialist culture, it was widely circulated as a representative cultural property of Japan along the channels of postwar Japanese expansionism, greatly aided by the American importation of karate-do through the military. in contrast to the original *tou-di*, which developed and spread out through the channel of popular defense, largely in secrecy, karate as an art of imperialist discipline became integrated into the dominant cultural paradigm [...] Such mythological consciousness was naturalized and widely disseminated not only by samurai films as mentioned earlier, but also by Hollywood's exotic rendition of Japanese culture. Lee's struggle in the world of martial arts, in due course, came to intersect with the realm of representation." (Kato 2007: 21). Kato's analysis is rich and right in many points; however, the premise of Okinawan karate as Chinese is biased.

founder of *Gōjū-ryū*,<sup>241</sup> synthesize the maxim *karate ni sente nashi*.<sup>242</sup> Whereas the first movie stands out in the popular mind, the second, *The Karate Kid II* (1986), reached greater box-office returns.<sup>243</sup> Interestingly the sequel moves its action to Okinawa, where Miyagi has to face an old antagonist with yakuza-like behavior that tyrannizes his home village. Many Okinawan topics like the *O-bon* festival and dances (day of the ancestors) are depicted through the footage.

Whereas global karate semiotics in the 80s were hanging, transitioning, between rude violence and the memory of modern samurai imperialism to the delicacies of Japanese aesthetics and martial ethics, in Japan, the situation of karate was, simply put, less virtuous. Despite its popularity, and illustrious exceptions like Mishima, the Okinawan martial art remained at the perimeter of the legitimate and high culture. Karate had largely impacted the social imaginary, and its practice was widespread in the mainland. The overall consideration, nonetheless, still situated karate far from the center of *budō* arts, and clearly way under the refinement and Zen-like spiritual depth demonstrated by *kyudo* (“the way of the bow”), *iaidō* or *aikidō*, to cite some.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> This conflict between violence and non-violence, which lies as the minimum constituent of *The Karate Kid* plot, is based on the life experience of the screenwriter, Robert Mark Kamen. In *Sports Illustrated* Kamen explained how on his early youth he was beaten up by some bullies, and therefore he began to take karate classes: “His earliest instructor was a truculent Marine captain who preached raw violence, which helped on the revenge front but which left Kamen desiring a deeper spiritual connection with the craft. He branched out and discovered Okinawan Goju-ryu, a defensive style designed to turn aggression on the aggressor with smooth blocks and sharp counterstrikes. Kamen trained four hours each day, seven days a week, under a teacher who spoke little English but who had learned directly from the founder of Okinawan Goju-ryu: a sensei named Chojun Miyagi.” (Prewitt 2018: n.p.).

<sup>242</sup> However, the interpretations of this “there is no first strike in karate” simple rule differs among many Okinawan masters. See Tankosich (2004).

<sup>243</sup> The discrete impact of the *Karate Kid* 2010 version can be explained by the confusion in presenting a kung fu movie with Jackie Cahn as the martial arts master. Maybe this homology between karate and kung fu was somehow “acceptable” in the 70’s and early 80’s, but not today.

<sup>244</sup> By several reasons, besides its Okinawan origins, that I will continue outlining in the next paragraphs, karate can hardly fit into the modern pattern of Zen martial arts. One responds to technical reasons and the modern deprivation of kobudo weapons to conform the “way of the empty hand”. The bodily dialog with weapons as training tools is crucial for Japanese martial arts at the core of Zen traditions: “with *iaidō* and, particularly, *kyudo*, the idea of meditation and solo practice are assembled into a seamless circle: one meditates while being still; out of this meditation a single short series of actions arises; the actions resolve themselves in stillness once more; this is visible to the onlooker; the practitioner is of the same meditating mind throughout. Being still, or in action, his (and today, also her) mind is as clear as water, and is uncontaminated by conscious or rational thought. [...] Eventually, the arrow finds its own mark; the sword cuts its own pattern; the person merely holds the weapon; he or she does not control it; the mindlessness of the person matches the mindlessness of the weapon; they move as one. Descriptions of this sort are invariably circular which is, again, in Zen, probably appropriate. This is all very well and good in solo practice with a weapon. What about empty-handed practice against an opponent? Here, it must be said that the only truly successful martial arts form *isaikidō* (the way of matched harmony), in



Having its national center in Osaka, were the Okinawan migration concentrated, karate was perceived, in general terms, as a tough martial art suitable for working classes and brusque or ill-mannered individuals.<sup>245</sup> Henceforth within Japan karate continued to be a martial art mainly of the social and cultural margins. Pending on future research, I think that there is a neat social class component of karate and karateka *habitus* regarding the position and dispositions in the social and symbolic space of practices and tastes in Japan, to follow Pierre Bourdieu terminology (2006). The scarcity of karate research in comparison with other Japanese martial disciplines like *kendō* or *judō* in Japan, as referred to in this thesis introduction, is a good indicator. Once again, and contrasting with the scant academic attention, products of cultural industries, principally literary and cinematographic, provide an excellent ground to support this statement. As for karate in manga outstand a title, immensely popular in Japan but practically unknown overseas, named *Osu!! Karate Bu*. It was published at the *Weekly Young Jump* from 1985 to 1996. The story follows the quarrelsome misadventures of an infamous karate club formed in an Osaka technical school. The Rakuten kobo webpage offers this *Ossu!! Karate Bu* plot briefing: “Kansai Fifth Technical High School is famous all over Osaka for its thugs. Here the weaklings get beaten into virtual slavery. In order to change his weak self, Matsushita joins the karate club...?!”.<sup>246</sup>

The motifs of karate, a wild strong character, and young gangs subculture all in conjunction were reproduced by many publications and movies. Therefore, by subgroup continuity, karate was closely associated with the Japanese *yakuza*,<sup>247</sup> as demonstrated by films like *The Street Fighter* series (1974), starring Sony Chiba, or Takashi Mike’s *Bodyguard Kiba* (1993). Both narratives also mingle the presence of *Yakuza* in Okinawa with martial arts.<sup>248</sup>

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which the energies of the opponents merge, and one seeks to use the attacking energies of the other as the fulcrum of his/her defence.” (Chan 2000: 72-73).

<sup>245</sup> For possible analogies with the case of Spain see Sánchez-García (2008); and Pérez-gutiérrez, Brown, Álvarez-del-Palacio, & Gutiérrez-García (2015). Karate in Spain is between the “strong” instrumentality of boxing as desired by working-class practitioners with less legitimized cultural capital, and the “soft” self-realizational purposes of *aikidō* more prone to be in the orbit of middle classes and bourgeoisie.

<sup>246</sup> The tone of the manga was, nevertheless, highly humoristic. The fame of *Osu!! Karate Bu* translated into live action movie in 1990 and a Super Famicom fighting game in 1994.

<sup>247</sup> For an overview of actual involvements between Okinawan *Yakuza* and karate dojos in the 60s see Quast 2015.

<sup>248</sup> Takeshi Kitano’s movies *Boiling Point* (1990) and *Sonatine* (1993) equally took place in Okinawa focusing on *Yazuka* gangs. Although there is no mention to karate it worth note that Kitano’s fascination

The question of karate ethnicity in the postwar period must be as well taken into account, but not only in regards to Okinawa but in this case with Korean descendants. From the late 70s to the 90s, the dominating figure of karate in Japan, at least in pop culture, was the *zainichi* (lit. “Korean living in Japan”, used for Korean descendants) Ōyama Masutatsu (born Choi Yeong-eui, 1923-1994). Oyama developed a new and spectacular karate style, Kyokushin (literally “the ultimate truth”), almost completely freed from kata, and focused on full-contact combat with heavy use of kicks nicknamed “The Strongest Karate”. The master’s renown was built in championships and demonstrations, but also upon mountain training retirements, legendary barehand bullfighting, bottleneck cutting, and a tour, allegedly undefeated, through the United States. Masutatsu saw his biography adapted into a highly successful manga (and anime) entitled *Karate Baka Ichi Day* (“A Karate-Crazy Life”) published by the *Weekly Shōnen Magazine* between 1971 and 1977.

His deeds were immortalized too in a trilogy of Japanese movies: *Karate Bear Fighter* (1975), *Karate Bullfighter* (1975), and *Karate for Life* (1977) starring one more time Sony Chiba. Oyama, commonly known as ‘The God Hand’ – a sign to the *ikken hissatsu* or the ability to kill a man with just one blow,<sup>249</sup> bore an enormous symbolic presence in many ways. He, a *zainichi*, provoked a karate boom in Japan trespassing all frontiers, being the strongest, illustrious and most worldwide appreciated Japanese karate master of the epoch. John Lie in *Multiethnic Japan* cites Oyama as “the person most responsible for its [karate] popularity in the West.” (Lie 2001, 64). In the same manner, Masutatsu served as inspiration for other types of global media, in this case, fighting videogames iconic franchises. Emerging media like videogames were a fundamental vector for propagating and underpin karate images worldwide. Not exclusively the Japanese but also Western companies created multiple titles like *Karate* (1982), *Karateka* (1984), *The Way of the Exploding Fist* (1985), or *International Karate +* (1987). The 1984 production, *Karateka*, pinned a milestone in videogames history because it was the first time that rotoscoping technology for motion-capture animation was used in the

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with the island’s coincided with the so-called “Okinawa Boom”; which we will explore in following sections.

<sup>249</sup> References to the mythical capacity of karate to kill in one blow are documented in early research works of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by western scholars specializing in “Japanology” and visiting Okinawa: “Their skill in boxing is such that a well-trained fighter can smash a large earthen water-jar, or kill a man with a single blow of his fist.” (Satow, 1874: 313).

industry.<sup>250</sup> Returning to Oyama, well-known leading characters like ‘Ryu’, the main protagonist of the *Street Fighter* series (1987- 2018), or ‘Mr. Karate’, from *The King of Fighters* (1994 - 2016), is inspired in the Kyokushin founder. The same Yukio Mishima was molded into the *Tekken* (1994 – 2017) videogame fighter Kazuya Mishima, founder of the fictional “Mishima-ryu Karate”, which is based on Oyama’s Kyokushin.

By these means, a close look to karate exposes once again the poorly perceived but constitutive multiculturalism of Japan, as well as the existence of a social stratification notably veiled by the *nihonjinron* ideologies. In the light of the above, the idea of karate as a tradition *tête à tête* with other Japanese martial arts at the core of *bushidō* legitimacies it is arguably problematic. The very same occurs when trying thus to sustain karate as a fine component of *nihonjinron* essentialism and homogeneity in historical terms, whether in the distant past or our current contemporaneity. Situated at the outer geographical and political boundaries of the Japanese nation, Okinawa and the Okinawan peoples are part of cultural (ethnic minorities) and social groups marginalized in Japan, along with Ainu or Koreans *zainichi*, and the *burakumin*. Marginalized cultures suffered social stigmatization, and its individuals and collectives usually face socio-economical discrimination. Ethnicity, social class, and culture are fulcrums of the sociological space of Japan that present significant correlations often overlooked. This convergence can be observed with precision in many facets of karate’s cultural history. As I have already noted, despite its global dissemination and fame during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, karate is not deemed as a fully “Japanese” refined art inside Japan, nor its peaceful attributes explicitly evident, for it is an inferior expression of toughness. The current process of karate heritagization, both in Okinawa and Japan, which I will discuss in the following sections, has among its many attempts to revert this kind of samplings:

The writer C. W. Nicol, who did a lot of martial arts training in his initial years in Japan, recalled, ‘To be in the same room with the *karate* master Masutatsu Oyama (1923–1994) [notorious for slaying bulls with his bare fists] was a frightening experience, but when I visited Ueshiba Sensei I felt nothing but warmth and light. Nonetheless, I still went flying when I tried to attack the aikidō master.’ (Stevens 2002: 20).

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<sup>250</sup> “In order to incorporate fluid animation into the martial-arts game *Karateka* (Broderbund, 1984), developer Jordan Mechner decided to film his karate instructor and trace over the motion-picture footage in a bid to copy the man's movement to his Apple II computer. This technique, called rotoscoping, was well-established in film and animation but it created a realistically moving character in a combat sports game for the first time. Mechner, who began working on the technique in 1982, used it again in the hit platformer *Prince of Persia* (Broderbund, 1989).” (Guinness World Records Webpage n.p.).

Despite being placed at the lower and edging tiers of genuine *bushidō*, karate fulfilled an inalienable asset for the symbolic capital and the ideological structure of the Japanese state at the international level. Karate was a nuclear component not only for cultural policies and diplomacy, but its notoriety translated into the realm of business management and efficiency. The economic bubble of the 80s had deepened the renewed fascination for the samurai ethic codes to the point that they came to be associated with the peculiarities of the Japanese businessman. The process of creating a huge layer of workforce devoted to the economic growth, by applying martial principles inherited from *budō* through the practice of sports has been defined as “salariman-ization” (*May 1989: 168*). The salaryman or *kigyō senshi* (“corporate warrior”) is a national symbol of 80s Japan, and one of the most universal stereotypes of the Japanese working culture. In order to explain and learn from the Japanese principles, marketing strategies, and firm decision making, karate used to (and still is) a commonplace (Cotter, Henley 1995; Hin, Serpa 1997; Shafer 2005). “Karate economics” nationalist depictions, however, tend to entail many re-inventions and assimilations that exemplify the split between the domestic and the foreign consumption of the Okinawan martial art concomitant ideas:

While military science offers a novel perspective for assessing competitive marketing situations, the Japanese martial art of karate may generate further insight for Western decision-makers in marketing strategies and tactics. Offered is an overview of the karate principles of “no-mindedness,” the “soft look,” and “non-interruption” with examples of their specific use by Japanese firms in business competition with Western companies. (Cotter, Henley 1995: 20).

In short, karate is a polyhedric culture in which practical boundaries cannot be segregated in ethnic, class, cultural or national breaks. Karate can neither be limited by nor excluded from *bushidō* and *nihonjinron* notions. It finds itself constituted upon manifold interpretations and social practices, that make karate circulate between the centers and the peripheries, always by the interceding of contextual circumstances. As we have seen in this chapter introduction, mirroring events of the distant past, during its modern history, karate has gained degrees of social and geographical interculturality. First, it became a pedagogical-political tool to serve both Okinawa assimilation and resistance inside the nation-building of prewar Japan. During the postwar recovery and the economic miracle of the 60s, the 70s expansion, and the 80s bubble, karate was demonstrating high malleability again and multiple layers as a cultural artifact; compiling a salient icon of the global mass culture that overwhelmed any other Japanese martial art

in disseminating core values of the nation. In this period, regardless of maintaining its representational status as a genuine expression of the Japanese culture, karate embodied a composite, profound and contradictory subject closely related to geopolitics and globalization. The Okinawan origins likewise the national and international adaptations and re-elaborations of karate produced a *de facto* multi-blended reality, at once essentialist and non-essentialist, hegemonic and contra-hegemonic.

May it seems an aporia, the aforementioned irresolvable disjunctions conform the best corpus to understand karate. A cultural representative that paradoxically in Japan is today more recognized as a national symbol than as a thoroughly practiced martial art or an enticing academic object of research. The ambivalences of the center-periphery dialectics continue commanding karate developments in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the way of example, I would like to call the attention to a minor linguistic matter that nonetheless informs about this karate reality: It is worth noting that unlike *judō*, *aikidō*, *kyūdō*, *iaidō* and so on, karate is more often than not written and spoken without the -do particle alluding to the “way” of Japanese martial arts. Recall at the same that the Kodansha *Encyclopedia of Japan* does not qualify karate along with the traditional martial arts of Japan but concedes that it is “loosely referred to as such outside of Japan” (Kodansha 1983: 158).<sup>251</sup>

Before finishing this section, I would like to introduce an additional observation regarding the sensitive issue of essentialism. I consider essentialism as a mirroring veil for the relation between Okinawa and Japan, hence acting mainly in the service of exclusion and not inclusion. Therefore, by association with ethnic origins and social class practices, essentialism correspondingly affects karate sociocultural property and properties. It was in 1989 that Pierre Bourdieu gave a lecture at the University of Tokyo entitled “Social Space and Symbolic Space”, addressing from the sociological point of view the many traps of substantialism. His words provide an excellent point to rethink what we have seen until now, and to re-ground a useful methodological standpoint for the following pages:

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<sup>251</sup> “Karate was historically most widely practiced in China and Okinawa and thus is not considered one of the traditional Japanese martial arts; it is, however, loosely referred to as such outside of Japan.” (Kodansha 1983: 158). This 80s definition is still active at newer editions; see: University of Hawaii - Okinawa Collection Blog (2019: n.p.)

The “substantialist” and naively realist reading considers each practice (playing golf, for example) or pattern of consumption (Chinese food, for instance) in and for itself, independently of the universe of substitutable practices, and conceives of the correspondence between social positions (or classes thought of as substantial sets) and tastes or practices as a mechanical and direct relation. [...] The substantialist mode of thought, which characterizes common sense - and racism - and which is inclined to treat the activities and preferences specific to certain individuals or groups in a society at a certain moment as if they were substantial properties, inscribed once and for all in a sort of biological or cultural *essence*, leads to the same kind of error, whether one is comparing different societies or successive periods in the same society [...] An initially aristocratic practice can be given up by the aristocracy - and this occurs quite frequently - when it is adopted by a growing fraction of the bourgeoisie or petitbourgeoisie, or even the lower classes (this is what happened in France to boxing, which was enthusiastically practiced by aristocrats at the end of the nineteenth century). Conversely, an initially lower-class practice can sometimes be taken up by nobles. In short, one has to avoid turning into necessary and intrinsic properties of some group (nobility, samurai, as well as workers or employees) the properties which belong to this group at a given moment in time because of its position in a determinate social space and in a determinate state of the *supply* of possible goods and practices. (Bourdieu 1998, 4).

For my analysis, Bourdieu words operate in many directions and stratum. His reflection is perfectly applicable to the cultural practice of karate during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as explored in this chapter. Far from being a steady reality, karate understanding, images, and cognitive associations are largely determined by the historical moment and the effective supply of modes of consumption. Such modes entail at the same time a relational sphere of positions, habitus and choices that stem and may modify the previous structure. Societal and cultural change is chained – both possible and restrained- by this dialectical architecture. The reformulation of karate image in the last decades, which I will deal in the following pages, to be attached to a high-culture tradition grounded in the times of the Ryūkyū Kingdom, represents an additional phase of the Okinawan martial art symbolic restructuration.

Drawing from numerous reflections and exemplary cases elaborated in this section, the question about the Japaneseness and Okinawanness of karate in the transition between modernity and contemporaneity acquires new dimensions and layers. Obviously, this fact does not mean the dissolving of hierarchies, dominances and constrictions. As I am about to delve into, the Okinawan karate – Japanese karate controversy is nowadays even more correlated to the globalization and geopolitical arenas: domestic and international relations, economic planning, soft power, cultural diplomacy, as well as national assets,

local heritage and tourism. At present, karate is at an inflection process for officially institutionalizing and re-build its position as an intrinsic expression of the Okinawan/Japanese traditions. Closely related to his inherited ambivalence, the most popular Japanese martial art is, at the same time, enlarging the social space of its supply of goods and practices in order to target international markets. I argue that it is precisely at the pleat of this double duality (Okinawa/Japan - Japan/Global) that resides the condition of possibility for the current heritage making and product branding of Okinawan karate as cultural property and economic niche. Therefore, karate stakeholders, influential organizations and national policies must come into new terms.

### **3.1.3. The Heritagization Process of Karate. Okinawa, Japan, and the UNESCO: A Case of Nation-Building Diatribes**

*¿a quién pertenece lo ocurrido?*

Manuel Cruz

This section provides a concise overview of the heritagization process of karate in Okinawa, from early local informal developments in the late '80s to the actual government-supported and globally announced initiative of present karate as a candidate to UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List. At the same time, it serves as an introduction to the last parts of the third chapter that address the creation of a karate tourism industry in Okinawa.

Since the late 90s karate is being re-associated to Okinawan local traditions, knowledge, rituals, and social practices. Hence it is usually performed in association with folk songs, lion dances, boat races, *eisa* dances, etcetera; as well as connected to spiritual landscapes like shrines, temples, tombs, and other spots (*utaki*) of the Okinawan indigenous religion. All these elements conform the typical Okinawan cultural landscape, re-defining the distinctiveness of Okinawan identity since the late 80s. By the same means, they perform as the unique attractive assets for driving tourism to the islands. Under this scheme and to announce karate as unique Okinawan heritage in 2017 the Karate Kaikan ("meeting hall", or "palace) was inaugurated near Naha. This section will manage the Kaikan will in the form of a rosette stone to decipher some relevant entanglements of karate's current heritagization process.

In a broad sense, as we have observed in this thesis, the shaping of karate as a distinct Okinawan heritage had actually begun in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when masters, academics, journalists and politicians started paying attention the Ryūkyūan martial discipline. Recall for instance Iha Fuyu's scholarly articles, Itosu's work towards the inclusion of karate at the islands school system, Nakasone as manager of the first society for the promotion of karate with Prefectural backup, or Funakoshi's writings regarding the *budō* principles of the Okinawan martial art.

Consequently, in the institutionalization and heritagization process of Okinawan karate, I define 3 stages lining up with its dissemination to Japan and then to the rest of the world: prewar, post-war and from the late 80s up to nowadays. During the long hiatus of Okinawa U.S. administration (1945-1972), there were considerable restrictions to travel between Japan and Okinawa. Despite the Okinawan efforts in the 30s the pivotal national center of karate had consolidated in Japan, where the Japan Karatedō Federation (JKF), formed in 1959 and under the auspices of the Cabinet since 1969, dominated the institutional scene. The end of the reversion raised the polemic again about the necessity and convenience of establishing a nationwide unified karate system, thus renewing the prewar controversy between "Okinawan karate" and "Japanese karate". In the mainland, karate, popular among high school and university students in the Tokyo and Kansai areas, was remarkably focused in combat (*kumite*) and competition. A regional effort to rebalance the loss of weighing of the local tradition gave birth to the Okinawa Ken Karatedō Renmei (Okinawa Prefecture Karatedō Federation) in 1981, and to the Okinawa Karate Kobudō Renmei (Okinawa Karate Kobudō Federation) in 1982.<sup>252</sup>

Thus, during the 80s Okinawa regained leadership at the sportive level too. Sakumoto Tsuguo (1947), Okinawan born and actual coach of the Japanese National Team, won the first place at the 7<sup>th</sup> World Karate-do Championship celebrated in 1984 in the Netherlands. Three years later, in 1987, the 42<sup>nd</sup> National Athletic Meet, *Kaihō Kokutai*, was held in Okinawa coinciding with the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the reversion. The Okinawan karate team won the gold medal. Unlike what happened with the arrival of the 1964 Tokyo torch Olympics and the celebration of Okinawa as part of Japan but under

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<sup>252</sup> The organization, nonetheless, under the umbrella of the Japan Karatedo Federation, had been originally established in 1956.



U.S. occupation “most residents had little interest in displaying the *hinomaru*. In a celebrated incident, it was pulled down from the flagpole at Okinawa’s National Sports Festival.” (Shimizu 2011: 52). That same year praising monuments to Higaonna Kanryō and Miyagi Chōjun, top representants of the Naha area karate traditions were erected in the whereabouts of Kume.

Resulting from the 80s economic bubble and the large development of Japanese national tourism, Okinawa re-appears significantly in the national popular imagination and develops as a preferred destination for tourism. Potential visitors are seduced by the Okinawa Boom movement and the Okinawa no *Kokoro* campaign (“the heart of Okinawa”, I will return to these later). In 1990, under the auspices of the Prefectural Government, the 1<sup>st</sup> World Uchinanchu Festival was held. Many Okinawans and descendants living abroad (*uchinanchu*) arrived at the archipelago for the occasion. Karate is an important identity marker for diasporic communities, and the *uchinanchu* identities celebrated at such festivals (Miyauchi 2016: 41; Ueunten, 2007: 165). Therefore, two Okinawan martial art demonstrations, “Karate and Ancient Martial Arts Exchange Festival” and “Japan-China Martial Arts Exchange Demonstration”, were performed among the main events at the 1990 Festival. Furthermore, it must be noted how, as demonstrates Ueunten (2007), internationalism is the trope emphasized by the Prefectural Government at Uchinanchu Festivals; hence the dominant slogans conceive Okinawa as an international bridge. As I will show later, this slogans and marketing procedures are currently being applied to karate for attracting cultural tourism.

The reconstructed Shuri Castle opened doors in 1992, and in homage to such a milestone, karate exhibitions were held at the official ceremonies, which moreover incorporated the awarding of the first Karate Merit Medals to Nagamine Shōshin (1907-1997), Higa Yuchoku (1910-1994), and Yagi Meitoku (1912-2003), an event sponsored by the Ryūkyū Shimpō newspaper. By linking itself to the Shuri castle karate was re-taking officially roots as an expression of the peaceful Okinawan heart, the Okinawan *kokoro*,<sup>253</sup> a high-class culture derived from the uniqueness of the Ryūkyū Kingdom idiosyncrasy:

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<sup>253</sup> “Idealized characterizations of Ryūkyū Kingdom history increasingly highlighted the period as one of peace and prosperity (despite evidence to the contrary) to the extent that cultivating peaceful relations was identified as being at the heart of a pacifist Ryūkyūan culture—that is, Okinawan cultural heritage.

the campaign rhetoric surrounding the restoration of Shuri Castle acquired by 1990 an additional layer of peace discourse that seals the connections among Shuri Castle as the premier example of Okinawan cultural heritage, as the “crown jewel” of Okinawa tourism, and as a manifestation of war redemption. [...] By the time of Shuri Castle Park’s opening on November 3, 1992, twenty years after Okinawa’s reversion to Japanese rule, a simultaneous “reversion to Ryūkyū” had taken place, offering a sense of local cultural and historical autonomy, an identification with premodern native origins that looked past the war and Okinawa’s entire history as a modern Japanese prefecture. The restoration of Shuri Castle constituted a symbolic “Ryūkyū Restoration.” [...] the Ryūkyū Shimpō reported in its wrap-up of the big news events of 1992, Shuri Castle Park “quickly blew wind into the Ryūkyū Kingdom boom.” Mainland—and even some local—attitudes toward Okinawan culture and customs could not have been more distant from what had been expressed during prewar and early postwar times when “Ryūkyūan” was a pejorative, and Okinawan ways were considered backward. Okinawa as Ryūkyū became cool. (Figal 2012: 153-155).

The arrival of 1995 marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of WWII finalization and the celebration of the Greater Ryūkyū Festival Kingdom (*Dai Ryūkyū - Matsuri O-Koku*). That year the Prefectural Board of Education published an institutional karate guide for schools (*Okinawa Karate Kobudo Graph* 1995) with 64 pages plenty of historical photos and precise information on Okinawan lineages and styles. With pictures and photos, the karate book highlighted too several Okinawan natural and cultural assets such as Shuri and the *gusuku* castles, the Bankoku Shinryo no Kane (the Buddhist bell with the famous inscription “Bridge to All Nations”), Ryūkyūan Kings, classic Naha port paintings, processions to Edo, the Shikinaen royal gardens, among others.

At that time, the Okinawa Budōkan was under re-construction (with the ongoing works equally portrayed at the 1995 karate manual pages). The new martial arts home in Okinawa held in 1997 the 1<sup>st</sup> Okinawa Karatedo & Kobudo World Tournament, totaling a number of 810 participants (755 from overseas, 51 nationalities),<sup>254</sup> thus making clear the global dimension of karate. To culminate the 90s endeavors to officially establish karate and kobudo as cultural heritages, both disciplines were designated as “Intangible Cultural Property” (*mukei bunkazai*) by the Prefectural Government. Such commitment was accompanied by the appointment of three masters (Nagamine Shōshin, Yagi Meitoku

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Private and public promotional literature on Okinawa is replete with expressions of this supposed native pacifism in the ‘Okinawan heart,’ backed by the myth of being a weaponless state during the reign of Shō Shin (r. 1477–1527).” (Figal 2012: 152).

<sup>254</sup> For the total numbers of 810 participants 755 where from overseas representing 51 nationalities. (1st Okinawa Karate International Tournament Executive Committee - History 2018: n.p.).

and Seiki Itozaku) as the first “Intangible Cultural Properties in the Field of Karate and Kobudo”.<sup>255</sup>

21<sup>st</sup> century accelerated a new stage of karate heritagization, framed by the fostering of activities planned for the cultural restoration and economic development of Japan’s southern archipelago. The G-8 summit in Okinawa, that took place in August 2000, highlighted again both the Ryūkyūs and karate on the world map. A web created for the summit by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Japan (MOFA) dedicated a specific article for the “Ryūkyūs martial arts” (MOFA. Kyūshū-Okinawa Summit 2000: n.p.). Similarly, the official acts for the world leaders reception, entitled “Turning the Eyes of the World on Okinawa, Sending the Spirit of Okinawa to the World”, included many Okinawan arts demonstrations, concluding with a five karate kata exhibition of Okinawan karate styles (MOFA. Kyūshū-Okinawa Summit 2000).<sup>256</sup> On a different event, Russian President Vladimir Putin was awarded with a 9<sup>th</sup> Dan certificate by the Japan Karate Federation and gifted with braided uniform and belt in recognition of “Mr. Putin’s contribution to the development and promotion of Oriental martial arts.” (KREMLIN 2000: n.p.). Besides, in November 2000, the UNESCO inscribed on The World Heritage List the “Gusuku Sites and Related Properties of the Kingdom of Ryūkyū”, featuring prominently Shuri Castle, the Shikinaen Gardens, and the Sefa Utaki, a historical sacred space. In the document of the Advisory Body Evaluation (ICOMOS), the section entitled ‘Justification by the state party’, that is Japan, states:

Each of the stone monuments and archaeological sites included in the nominated property illustrates the unique development and transition that Ryūkyū underwent through political, economic, and cultural interchanges with mainland Japan, China, and south-east Asia [...] Indeed, the entire nominated property is rooted in the spiritual lives and daily activities of the local people as an active setting for such [contemporary] rituals. (UNESCO - World Heritage List 2017)

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<sup>255</sup> According to a description available in a plaque at the Karate Kaikan Museum these are the “Criteria for Certification as an Intangible Cultural Property Holder: Those who embody to a high degree the techniques and methods of karate or kobujutsu that have been specified as prefectural intangible cultural properties. Those who embody the techniques and methods of karate or kobujutsu and who are experts on them. Members of the groups composed of these persons, in the event that two or more persons, as a group, embody to a high degree the techniques and methods of karate and kobujutsu.” (Okinawa Karate Kaikan Museum)

<sup>256</sup> The kata performed were Heiku, Tensho, A-nan, Passai, Sanchin, representing the main four Okinawan styles Naha-te, Shuri-te, Uechi-ryu and Ryuei-ryu.

As for karate, that first year of the new millennia six more karate masters were recognized as “Intangible Cultural Properties”. Some of the most important global issues addressed by the world leaders during the Okinawa G-8 submit were world economy, development, cultural diversity, education and trade, with a special place for the IT and the Global Information Society. (MOFA 2000: n.p.). Following this last directive the Japanese government, under the international branding strategy for Okinawan tourism, developed the most extensive local digital archive ever created in Japan, a 1.5 billion yen project named *Wonder Okinawa* and launched in 2003.<sup>257</sup> The Ryūkyū Shimpō newspaper, as we may remind closely related to the history of karate, proposed a section in the web for “Karate and martial arts with weaponry” under the folklore category. The *Wonder Okinawa* project can be regarded as one of the first efforts in the digitalization of intangible cultural heritage. In the comprehensive karate webpage several texts, photos and videos are dedicated to the “techniques of the masters” meaning those nine being “Intangible Cultural Asset Title Holders”.<sup>258</sup>

Certainly, around the year 2000, the Japanese Government was undertaking many initiatives to depict a newer sensibility towards cultural diversity in Japan. The inclusion of karate at the MOFA webpage for the G-8 submit with the denomination “Ryūkyū martial arts” is self-evident. Similarly, the UNESCO recognition, under the auspices of Japan, of Okinawan tangible and intangible cultural heritage attending precisely to its peculiarities as “Properties of the Kingdom of Ryūkyū” is an unmistakable sign. Since the late 90s academic research identified this shift in the national rhetoric of Japan, which apparently was leaving behind the *nihonjinron* homogeneity to open the public appreciation of the nation’s inner multiculturalism. However already then Morris-Suzuki (1998) coined the term “cosmetic multiculturalism”, to point how that acknowledgement of diversity was nonetheless notably superficial. Guarné (2017) explains how the

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<sup>257</sup> “At its peak, Wonder Okinawa was Japan’s largest regional digital archive. It consisted of a total of 10,000 web pages, and around 10 h of high definition digital video. It was one of the largest video digital archives seen on a global scale. Around 500 people (authors, creators, and performers) participated in generating the content, 80 % of whom were people from Okinawa Prefecture.” (Wertheimer, Asato 2016: 63-64).

<sup>258</sup> Thanks to the services of the internet archive project “wayback machine”, despite the disablement of the Wonder Okinawa page in 2011 we can still access to a good part of the contents. See: Okinawa Prefecture. *Wonder Okinawa* (2003).

discourse of Japan's multicultural society, the *tabunka kyōsei shakai*, was an extension of previous policies that served for the celebration and consumption of the difference:

Con el paso del tiempo, la articulación política del discurso de las *tabunka kyōsei shakai* (sociedad multicultural) acabaría derivando en una prolongación de las políticas anteriores de la *kokusaika* [internacionalización], en una suerte de «multiculturalismo» cosmético ajustado al patrón de las tres *f* (*fashion, festival, food*). (Guarné 2017: 28).<sup>259</sup>

Therefore, it must not be a surprise to recognize how this Japanese state policy was not only cultural but also economical. While nurturing the distances from Japan's imperialist and colonial past, Japan's official multiculturalism was given the task to drive the transformations of the country's stagnant economic structure, via the possibilities of cultural capitalism to internationalize relevant markets. The importance of the three *f* pattern is an unmistakable proof of the uses of local cultures to support the branding of the nation. In other words, the recognition and commodification of Japan cultural and regional diversity was a pre-requisite to attract international tourism and favor the country commercial balance. The main column of Japan internationalization, tourism objectives, and cultural industries interceding, tightly connected to refurbishment and securing of the national cultural properties, was designated as the Cool Japan strategy. Later we will deepen in Okinawa as the main post for developing experimental tourism initiatives. For now, let us recall Figal's quote some lines above about how highlighted by the Shuri Castle park inauguration "Okinawa as Ryūkyū became cool" (2012: 155). Karate, in turn, was on its way to reaching such a status underpinned by the state officiality.

The integration of cultural practices into market-oriented commodifications, by virtue of Okinawan heritage distinctiveness persisted its maturation, always reserving a place for karate. During the first years of the 2000s, two of the most successful theme parks in Okinawa habilitated spaces for karate. Murasaki Mura, a former recording studio for the *Ryūkyū no Kaze* (1993) Taiga Drama, hosts the International Karate Study Centre. By its part, the Ryūkyū Mura park advertises "Ryūkyū karate" along with other crafts, promoted as gateways to the Ryūkyū Kingdom:

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<sup>259</sup> "with the passage of time, the political articulation of the *tabunka kyōsei shakai* discourse (multicultural society) would eventually lead to an extension of the previous *kokusaika* policies [internationalization], in a kind of "cosmetic multiculturalism" adjusted to the pattern of the three *f*'s (*fashion, festival, food*)." The translation is mine.

Lives performances (music, dance, karate), live demonstrations on folk arts and crafts (dyeing, *bingata*, pottery), and hands-on learning designed to give the visitor a direct sense of the Ryūkyū past – the tagline for the place is *tsukuru, kataru, manabu* (making, narrating, learning). (Figal 2012: 133)

The official heritagization of karate continued a steady and projected progression. It was yet in 2005, that the prefectural Government designated October 25<sup>th</sup> as the “Karate Day”, memorializing the 25<sup>th</sup> October 1936 meeting I have explored in previous sections. The date selected for the “Karate Day” reveals a larger envision that explicitly constructs a heritagization narrative by linking significant temporary moments in history and fixing them as commemorative events of the Ryūkyūan exotic peaceful culture. The resolution passed by the Okinawa Prefectural assembly to designate karate day in 2005 read as follows:

Un gran principio filosófico *karate ni sente nashi* que significaría no hay primer ataque en karate (literalmente: “un karateka nunca hace el primer movimiento”, o “no ataca nunca primero”) y la vida es un tesoro (*nuchidu takara*), frase que muestra un máximo respeto por la vida son los pensamientos sobre los que están basados la frase *heiwa no bu* (que podría ser traducida como “la paz militar”), uno de los principios que busca la sociedad actual, y a los que estamos seguros que el karate, gracias a sus principios, contribuye efectivamente.

Esta asamblea de la prefectura declara su apoyo al desarrollo y crecimiento del karate tradicional de Okinawa, haciendo de éste una herramienta para la búsqueda de la paz en el mundo entero. Además, confirmamos nuestro deseo de hacerlo un factor de contribución a la felicidad de todas las personas. Por lo tanto, proclamamos el 25 de octubre como el día del karate. (Okinawa Traditional Karate and Kobudo 2016: n.p.).<sup>260</sup>

From the words above, it is easy to verify how karate continues to bear an inescapable and transcending political dimension. A few years later, in 2008, the Okinawa Dentō Karatedō Shinkōkai (“Society for the Advancement of the Traditional Okinawa Karate”), an umbrella corporation uniting four of the leading karate federations was

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<sup>260</sup> Remarkably, unlike the Spanish one, the English version of the webpage prefectural proclamation has been deprived to the *heiwa no bu* reference. Here I present my translation of the Spanish contents: “A great karate philosophical principle *karate ni sente nashi* that would mean there is no first attack in karate (literally: ‘a karateka never makes the first move’, or ‘he never attacks first’) and life is a treasure (*nuchidu takara*), a phrase that shows the utmost respect for life are the thoughts on which are based the phrase *heiwa no bu* (which could be translated as ‘military peace’), one of the principles sought by today’s society, and to which we are sure that karate, thanks to its principles, contributes effectively. This prefectural assembly declares its support for the development and growth of traditional Okinawan karate, making it a tool for the search for peace throughout the world. Furthermore, we confirm our desire to make it a contribution to the happiness of all people. Therefore, we proclaim October 25<sup>th</sup> as the Day of Karate.”

founded. The authoritative organization had in the person of the governor of Okinawa, Nakaima Hirokazu, son of Nakaima Genkai (1908-1984) a well-known karate master, its first chairman.<sup>261</sup> The Society was born with the purpose of preserving, worldwide popularizing and positioning Okinawa as “not only the birthplace of karatedō and kobudō but also the Mecca for world karate.” (Okinawa Karate Information Center 2020).

In 2011, the same year that the *Wonder Okinawa* digital archive was dismantled, the Okinawa Traditional Karate Liaison Bureau (OTKLB) began its activities with the funding of the Industry Creation Support Project of the Okinawa Prefecture Culture and Arts Promotion. The bureau was created to foster the mission of promoting traditional karate and increase the international awareness of Okinawa as “the birthplace of karate”, with a remarkable effort on the web presence by using Social Media. With this directive in mind, a documentary web series entitled *The Land of Karate* were produced along with the first “Okinawa Karate Guide for Visitors” covering a wide range of information regarding tourist services and proper etiquette for foreigners in Okinawa.<sup>262</sup> The karate bureau also did multiple appearances in Japanese media, especially at the 2014 NHK World documentaries *The Spirit of Okinawa Karate* and *Journeys in Japan - Okinawa karate*; as well as in international martial arts magazines like *Karate Bushido* (France) and *Blitz* (Australia). The press release of the recently opened office clearly stated that the aforementioned objectives would “aim at contributing to the further industrial development of Okinawa through tourism activities and related business.” (The Applied Karate Blog 2011: n.p.). Thus, we can observe once more how the public discourse of karate converged into the heritage and economic revitalization.

Concurring again with the “Karate Day” in 2014 the Okinawa Prefectural Government officially announced its intention to develop the karate candidature to UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage list. I will later expound on this candidature. For the moment it is important to underline a couple of additional milestones of karate heritagization. To formally safeguarding the legacy of the designated karate masters,

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<sup>261</sup> That the political head of the Okinawan Prefecture is the chairman of the biggest karate organization in the islands is a structural decision, Tamaki Denny, the actual governor, continues to bear that position. During the years the former presidents of The Okinawa Prefectural University of Arts, Tokumasa Miyagi (a karate specialist that has also worked for the Prefectural Museum), and of The Okinawa International University, Moritake Tomikawa, have also served as presidents of the association.

<sup>262</sup> For the guide refer to: Okinawa Traditional Karate Liaison Bureau. (2012).

2016 witnessed the creation of the “Okinawa Prefecture designated intangible cultural asset ‘Okinawa Karate and Kobujutsu’ preservation society” (*Okinawa ken shitei mukei bunkazai ‘Okinawa no karate kobujutsu’ hozonkai*). Soon after its settling, those four still alive made a public statement demanding the Prefectural Government the establishment of the **Okinawa Prefecture Karate Promotion Division** (*Okinawa ken karate shinkōka*). The petition was immediately granted, and the Karate Promotion Division meant to operate as policy planner while coordinating a network of local karate actors, incorporated to the Culture, Tourism and Sports Department. As has happened many times in the past in regards karate affairs, the Ryūkyū Shimpō newspaper announced straight away that the government organism: “will also take over the work of the Cultural Promotion Division in promoting Okinawa karate to be listed with UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage.” (Ryūkyū Shimpō 2016).

The definitive landmark for the Okinawan martial art legitimate candidature to UNESCO was going to be the Okinawa Karate Kaikan.<sup>263</sup> A multipurpose facility announced by the Prefectural Governor in 2012 with an initial budget of 6.5 billion yen—more than 58 million dollars, the Kaikan opened doors in 2017, presenting an impressive building an of 7.810 m<sup>2</sup>. Without a doubt the Kaikan stands for the ultimate symbol of the construction of karate as cultural heritage. The new iconic site pursues to attract the attention of the karate community worldwide. Thus, according to the Prefecture it was inaugurated to serve as a pilgrimage center, “the representative facility for ‘the holy land of karate.’” (Okinawa Karate Promotion Division 2016). In the same vein, the headlines of the Ryūkyū Shimpō coverage marked the Kaikan as a “Dawn of a new era for Okinawa Karate” thought to “drive karate’s listing as a UNESCO intangible cultural heritage”. (Ryūkyū Shimpō 2017: n.p.).

The importance and significance of the Kaikan, situated close to the Prefectural Budōkan but exclusively consecrated to karate, is capital, for the building and its museum acts as the definitive emblem of karate heritagization process. At the official webpage, the Kaikan defines its mission as follows:

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<sup>263</sup> Several of the findings here developed regarding the Kaikan and the binding of karate to Okinawan rituals and sacred places were presented at the Workshop Religion and Sport in Japan, organized by the Western Michigan University in March 2019. The paper had as title: “The Congregation of Religious Symbols and Martial Practices in Okinawa: Cosmogony, Identity, and Ideology in Modern Karate.”



to preserve, inherit and develop traditional Okinawan Karate as a unique cultural heritage, tell people both in and outside Japan that 'Okinawa is the birthplace of Karate' and be a facility that can be used as a place to learn the essence of Karate. (Okinawa Karate Kaikan).

The emplacement for the Karate Kaikan has been carefully selected, not too far from the airport and the Prefectural Budōkan, and very close to a relevant group of Okinawan heritage sites. It is situated in the Tomigusuku Castle site park, near the cave that was once the local headquarters for the Japanese Navy, now a significant tourist attraction, a war memorial, and a fundamental component of the Okinawan spiritual landscape. Ancestor worship is one of the main ritual duties of the Okinawan tradition; not by coincidence, outside the grounds of the Karate Kaikan remain two tombs, in the distinctive *kamekobaka* construction type, that have been preserved for a respectful exhibit of the Ryūkyūan culture.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> They perfectly fit with the drawings that can be observed in Kerr 1958: 218.



*Figure 18 – A Okinawan kamekobaka or ‘turtle-back’ tomb preserved at the Karate Kaikan grounds to showcase a distinctive feature of the Okinawan sacred landscape. Source: the autor (2018).*

Conforming a multi-structure complex, the Kaikan includes a dojo with 4 competition venues for karate championships and other large demonstration events. Training rooms, conference and seminar rooms, a research room, a museum, a restaurant and a souvenir shop complete the indoor area. Beyond the main building an exterior training zone can be found, and a small “Special Dojo” named Shurei Hall (originally projected to be called *Oku-no-in* or ‘inner sanctuary’), meant for special occasions like high-ranking tests and promotional performances. While the main structure has been built in a modern abstract architectural way, the Shurei Hall, a small vermilion building with a red tile roof, stands as an explicit reference to the Okinawan style. By its shape and name, the Shurei Hall indicates a connection to the most iconic pair of structures of the Ryūkyū Kingdom, reconstructed after WWII as symbols of Okinawan identity: Shuri Castle and Shurei Gate.

The Kaikan emplacement and its architectural allusions to Shuri Castle raise important questions in terms of politico-religious matters. As we have seen in previous chapters of this thesis, according to several researchers on Okinawan religion, despite the early presence of Buddhism in the islands, its official support by the Ryūkyūs monarchy, or the considerable influence of Confucianism upon the social elites, the common inhabitants of the archipelago maintained their folk beliefs.<sup>265</sup> In modern times, this resistance continued even with the Japanese nation making considerable attempts to incorporate the multiplicity of local traditions into State Shintō, in this instance creating the “Ryūkyū Shintō” label. Back in 1925, the Japanese Government assimilation project reconfigured Shuri Castle as the “Okinawa Shrine” to be integrated into the State Shintō system and serve to the glory of the emperor and the nation. As Tze May Loo has observed this sought to convert:

A symbol of the Ryūkyū Kingdom’s political and cultural autonomy into a functioning node of Japanese nationalism. This use of Shuri castle was also part of the larger effort by the Japanese state to appropriate Okinawa’s indigenous *utaki*-centered religion to consolidate Japanese rule of the islands. (Loo 2014: 17).

Nevertheless, this morphing of Shuri Castle into the Okinawa Shrine only lasted until WWII when the Battle of Okinawa completely obliterated the zone. The Ryūkyū Shintō policy did not fully consolidate in Okinawa, where *utaki*, different types of natural sacred spaces, continued to be considered the communal spiritual grounds of the native religion. Still, Shintō ideology continue operating today in contemporary Japan based on an allegedly national idiosyncratic way of relating with nature and divine. Maintaining this general frame, the Ryūkyūs religious particularity was officially recognized by the Japanese Government in the 2004 “Okinawa Declaration on Intangible and Tangible Cultural Heritage”, that define *utaki* as follows:

*Utaki* are sacred spaces characteristic of the Okinawa islands, the southernmost islands of Japan. Many of these sacred spaces are small forests or woods where tropical trees and plants grow. In the *Utaki* are ancestors, divinities from nature such as trees and cereals, or founders of villages are worshipped. Many ceremonies take place here throughout the year. It is the place to which local people feel that their heart belongs, and

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<sup>265</sup> For further developments see Beillevaire (1986: 77) and Mabuchi (1980: 1).

at the same time it serves as the repository of common memory, and diverse intangible cultural heritages such as songs or dances. (Okinawa International Forum 2004: 155).<sup>266</sup>

The Kaikan, meant to represent the essence of Okinawa as the sacred place of karate, has been constructed not just with a discrete reference to Shuri Castle but explicitly close to one of the most representative *utaki* of Okinawa in historical and touristic terms. The Tomigusuku Castle, near the back of the Kaikan, dates from around the 14<sup>th</sup> century, at the peak moment of warfare among warlords (*aji*) seeking to unify the Ryūkyūs. Along with the castle, once “the command and control center” of the military infrastructure of the Kingdom, (Smits 2019a: 42) lies Tomise Utaki, a sacred spot revered as the origin place of the Okinawan Harii boat races, where the dragon god of water and rain is worshipped. The ritual celebration at Tomise Utaki, before the harii races, is held by priestesses and shamanesses praying for rainmaking and good harvests. In a more formal and private environment at the site, the ceremony includes a karate demonstration with performers wearing traditional Okinawan costumes.<sup>267</sup> The harii races which are held at the beach, praying for maritime fortune and copious fishing, are one of the main tourist attractions of the islands. These races also feature traditional karate performers on boats. The actual participation of traditional karate performances in old Okinawan religious rituals like the Harii boat races or the Naha Tug-of-war obviously meet touristic porpoises but also work to re-sacralize karate by an attachment to the local rites. Currently, Okinawa prefecture is looking to include traditional karate within the UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage List under the “social practices, rituals and festive events” category, since there is no possible denomination for martial arts or sports.<sup>268</sup>

The government-sponsored heritage marketing of Okinawan karate is a well-dedicated, multiple oriented, perfectly rounded and all-encompassing official campaign from the point of view of the narrative. At the web page of “Okinawa Link Islands,” we read that at the Kaikan “karate is treated as its own unique cultural heritage” (Be.Okinawa

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<sup>266</sup> The Forum was supported by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, and the Agency of Cultural Affairs.

<sup>267</sup> For the differences between the Okinawan *utaki* sacred groves and the Japanese, as well as their shifting uses and resignifications see Rots (2019).

<sup>268</sup> Korea has been the only country registering (2011) a cultural practice, the Taekkyeon, with the specific epigraph “traditional martial art” in the UNESCO ICH list, under the “Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe” and “Performing arts” domains.

ISLAND LINK 2020: n.p). At the same internet site, a 3-day recommended route named “Journey to the Ryūkyū Kingdom” the karate experience embodies “the spirit of Shurei no Kuni” the famous inscription of the Ryūkyū Kingdom as the land of propriety. Hence the visitors will be able to appreciate karate as a piece of the kingdom’s worshipping of “peace, respected propriety, strengthened cultural and trade exchanges with neighboring countries such as China, Japan and Southeast Asia”.

The construction and emplacement of the Kaikan epitomize the heritagization process of karate, which unavoidably creates a narrative, outlined by the Kaikan museum, linked to the Ryūkyū Kingdom and the pride of distinct Okinawan lore. In the same manner, the underlying spiritual and technical aspects of karate practices as a piece of the Okinawan worldviews underpin the martial art candidature, as they convey Okinawan understandings about elements and natural phenomena, including health concepts, that fit into the UNESCO ICH domain of ‘knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe’.

Nonetheless, this same process of heritagization requires Japan’s economic patronage, infrastructure and relevance as a global actor, including the influence upon UNESCO – via partnerships and financial contributions- and The Tokyo 2021 Olympics organization. Hence, the Kaikan is the result of a local process of intangible heritage revitalization that at the same time derives from Japan national policies. In spite of this top-down management, karate conforms a valuable asset in maintaining and transmitting a wide communal sense of historical continuity, identity, moral values, self-awareness, and celebration of diversity for Okinawa. This cultural repository of knowledge and skills is manifested not only in the particular practices of Okinawan karate as a martial art but more importantly by karate as part of a minority group, expressing an encompassing view of its own culture. A culture at the same time is dialoguing with other East Asian territories through martial arts as Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Likewise the Kaikan, the karate UNESCO candidature is a multilayered reality accommodating manifold and divergent interests and henceforth evidencing some tensions, mostly in the political and cultural identity realms. As explored in the above pages several actions, organizational, propagational, discursive, etc. have been developed in the last decade to build up karate as intangible cultural heritage, and hence ground the possibility of being included among the world assets recognized by the UNESCO.

Despite the interest confluence of this final objective, many ambitions and contradictory purposes raise between Okinawa and Japan mainland regarding the contents, future and therefore representativeness of karate.

In this regard, the debate raised in a symposium held in September 2017 specifically focusing in the UNESCO candidature manifested such tensions. (Okinawa Karate Information Center 2017). The principal lecturer was Matsuura Kōichirō director of the Japan Karate Association (JKA) and a notorious Japanese diplomat since the 70s. Among many charges, he has been Chairperson of the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO between 1998 and 1999, and UNESCO's Director-General between 1999–2009. For his speech, Matsuura was accompanied by Nakahara Nobuyuki, also a former chairman of the JKA (1986-2015), board member of the Bank of Japan (BOJ) and well-know mentor of the Prime Minister Abe Shinzō, to the point that he has been pointed as “one of the architects of Abenomics”. (The Japan Times 2017: n.p.).<sup>269</sup>

Mr Kochiro lecture remembered that at first the UNESCO World Heritage only contemplated material culture such buildings and items that had survived the passing of time. The idea on incorporating intangible cultural heritage that was already part of the Japanese national conception of intangible cultural properties (think of performing arts like *kabuki*, *bunraku*, folk rituals and festivals) to UNESCO's definitions was suggested and approved during Kochiro's mandate (2003). Mr Kochiro stressed the necessity for the Okinawan stakeholders to work together with the Japanese government and experts in intangible cultural heritage for a successful application. In his view there is a pungent necessity of conducting thorough research to i) demonstrate how traditional karate differentiates from sports karate because sports are not mattered of UNESCO's considerations; and ii) acknowledging the previous point and the blatant globality of karate as a social and cultural practice, build solid evidences and arguments to demonstrate that karate is originally from Okinawa; verifiable evidence confirming a historical trajectory.

For his part, Mr Nakahara lecture made clear how the UNESCO acceptance will come after the recognition of karate as Intangible Cultural Property at the national level. He praised the role of Funakoshi Gichin, “father of modern karate” and main historical

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<sup>269</sup> He has been also member of the Japan Banking Association, and President of Tonen Corp. Oil.

figure of Japanese karate in spite of being Okinawan. He also spotlighted the pre and postwar importance of mainland University clubs (Keio, Tokyo, Waseda, etc.) for the history of karate. From this perspective, Nakahara argued about the importance of traditional karate over sports karate but with a not minor nuance: he assessed the place of Shotokan among the traditional schools, a subject of clear controversy with Okinawan masters. At the same time his talk accentuated the necessity of an Okinawan - Japanese karate cooperation, establishing one origin but two traditions:

As I understand it, in every region of Okinawa with the occasion of some celebration or for educational purposes traditional karate is widely exhibited – this is what I have heard - and although I think traditional karate is also exhibited in every region of Japan, I consider that perhaps it would be the most necessary that particularly Okinawa as a center emphasizes such traditional facet by giving us its understanding.

As I said before, what is called karate is not a native Japanese karate. Having emerged originally in Okinawa, Master Funakoshi in the eleventh year of Taishō (1922) took it to Japan properly speaking and he spread and developed it. Without forgetting that source in any way, traditional Japanese karate arises after Japan sowed the seed, having as its foundation the soil that is the traditional bushidō that is proper to it. That Okinawa preserves and develops traditional karate in Okinawa, that is, in my opinion, the most important thing. (Okinawa Karate Information Center 2017).<sup>270</sup>

As it can be seen the fitting tensions between the karate as a dual Japanese/Okinawan cultural asset persist at the center of a debate which historical roots, ramifications and implications are being mobilized again by the UNESCO application. Irremediably Japan needs to acknowledge and support the Okinawa karate tradition to capitalize karate for branding the nation internationally. Hence, by this complex view, inside karate we find one origin, the Okinawan, two traditions, Okinawa karate and Japanese karate, and one national heritage, that is, karate as a whole. If karate is about to succeed in the UNESCO enterprise, the revitalization and re-ritualization, that is strengthening its bond with other characteristic Okinawan rituals, seems to not only be desirable but rather, as pointed by the discussants in the symposiums previously mentioned, the only possible way. Therefore, despite the many diatribes, there is only one possible solution regarding the karate candidature to the UNESCO: acting by way of a consensus. In fact, everything seems to indicate, in the light of what exposed regarding

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<sup>270</sup> I want to express my gratitude to Professor Gustavo Pita with the translation of the text.

the heritagization process of karate since the 90s, that there is a remarkable convergence among actors.

Iwabuchi (2005) has noted how by combining nation branding, in this case, the iconic power of karate, and cultural diplomacy, that is the UNESCO recognition, the states not only address their efforts to the international stage but “also internally, as a tool for inculcating a narrative of the nation and a sense of national belonging.” (Iwabuchi 2005: 427). By acting globally, the states can persuade their citizens to join the national narratives “as ‘representatives, stakeholders and customers’ of the brand [...] to perform as ambassadors for the nation branding campaign.” (Iwabuchi 2005: 427).

Indeed, another permanent committee expressly set in 2019 for working on the karate UNESCO candidature announced “ritual” as the main keyword, and this ritual pertains very particularly to the Okinawan cultural sphere domain. Neither martial arts nor sports, despite being part of the UNESCO Intangible List linguistic field, conform a recognized domain of the convention as “social practices, rituals and festive events” do.<sup>271</sup> Thus, this last category makes sense in constructing a wide communal sense of historical continuity, moral values, self-awareness, and celebration of diversity for Okinawa and Okinawan karate. Moreover, it is usual for recognized ICH assets to pertain to two or more domains of the convention.

So, it is possible to nurture karate’s candidature through resources of the own martial practice as the traditional training tools or *kobudō* weapons, of all of them assumed to have mostly agrarian origins, which may well fall into the ‘traditional craftsmanship domain’. The underlying spiritual and technical aspects of karate practices, in the same manner, represent a good underpin, as sometimes they are tied to Okinawan worldviews about elements and manifestations of nature, including health concepts, that would fit into the domain of ‘knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe’, or even the ‘performing arts’ one. This has been the case of other martial arts recognized by UNESCO as the Malaysian/Indonesian Silat and the Korean Taekkyeon.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> In its second article the 2003 UNESCO Convention defines five domains in which intangible cultural heritage “is manifested inter alia”: oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; traditional craftsmanship. (UNESCO 2018).

<sup>272</sup> The officially recognized intangible cultural heritages related to martial arts are the following (with the exact denomination used by the UNESCO): Silat (Malaysia) and Traditions of Pencak Silat (Indonesia)



From this perspective, the idea of reinstating/reify karate as an inextricable component of Okinawan traditional rituals and festivities expand the reach of its intangible heritage. Associated with folk festivities like the tug-of-war, boat races, lion dances, tombs, monuments, and spiritual landscapes, karate capitalizes resources of the Okinawan material culture beyond its specific subfield.<sup>273</sup>

Thus, following the UNESCO expectative, karate has to show acquiescence with the idea of an art that needs to be preserved because it results from a very particular cultural set, that has been passed down by ancestors, and thus is meant to the self-recreation of the Okinawan community. Two consequences are derived from this obligation. First, karate candidature will only make full sense if it is viewed as an embodier of a more comprehensive cultural background steaming from the historical culture of the Ryūkyūs. Secondly, conceived as such, karate needs to deepen the knowledge about the biographies and memorabilia (personal objects, scripts, letters, photos, ...) of the Okinawan masters as Okinawan peoples, going beyond mere karate matters to gain insight of their identities as a whole. To expand by the historical repository of karate, as currently happening, brings knowledge while sets the stage to erect statues and monuments at significant locations, establish commemorative days and so on. Inevitably, this reenactment of the past through the particular lens of karate gives rise to the multiples grievances that Okinawa has suffered especially during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, in the same manner that makes justice in shedding light to those abuses, can serve to obscure past and present matters, reifying the myth of an all-unified pacifist Ryūkyūan land.

Precisely the slogan of the karate UNESCO committee is: “The spirit of peace; tying the ritual of Okinawa Karate to the UNESCO ring” (Ryūkyū Shimpō 2019: n.p.).

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in 2019; Chidaoba wrestling (Georgia) and Khon, masked dance drama (Thailand) in 2018; Tahteeb, stick game (Egypt) in 2016 ; Capoeira circle (Brazil) in 2014; Taekkyeon, a traditional Korean martial art (Republic of Korea) in 2011; Chhau dance (India), Pahlevani and Zoorkhanei rituals (Iran) and Peking opera (China) in 2010; Yueju opera (China) in 2009. As it can be seen only 3 may be accurately regarded as Asian martial arts, and only one, the Korean, named distinctively as a traditional martial art.

<sup>273</sup> This conjunction of interests and the reconstruction efforts does not mean that this karate attachment to Okinawan rituals should be plain read is invented traditions. What is happening is the revitalization and re-popularization of ways of practice that had been considerably cornered during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We know that karate masters of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century participated in Okinawan folk rituals like the Tug-of-War and the Dragon boat races, which by the way frequently ended quarrelsomely, for such rituals were manifesting agonistic competitions usually delimited by village boundaries.

While drawing on the ideal of traditional martial arts as self-defense systems centered on traditional *kata*, that is a kind of ritual performance, over-aggression or modern sport-fighting (*kumite*), it conveniently aligns with the peace-oriented discourses and programmatic lines of the United Nations. We have seen how the pacifist discourse can operate in favor of the US-Japan geopolitics imposed in Okinawan territories. It is important to remark that policy advisors of the Okinawa Prefecture have suggested preparing the karate application to the UNESCO for 2022, coinciding with the 50<sup>th</sup> commemoration of Okinawa's reversion to Japan (Okinawa Dentō Karate Shinkokai 2019: n.p.), and consequently reinstating Okinawa's political affiliation by means of karate.

However, beyond the policies design upon Okinawan karate, I want to note that this 'spirit of peace' alluded by the committee is a praiseworthy desideratum that not necessarily implies an intention of re-reading the history and to conform nationalistic norms, but can truly express the feelings and hopes of a good part of the Okinawan peoples, still very aware of the unspeakable horrors of war. Competing or converging political and economic interests, supra, national, or local, institutional or individual, are only a part of the multiple factors in configuring societal realities, luckily not reducible to top-down processes.

In sum, karate, besides the Kaikan, is in itself a site of heritage, expressing cultural diversity and circumscribing narratives that transverse temporal, geographical and political boundaries. The Okinawan martial art still channels contemporary allegations about the past that can be consistent or contradict normative discourses about the Okinawa-Japan relation. Nevertheless, the UNESCO acceptance is devised, at least at the governmental level, as an inflexion point not only because the tremendous symbolic significance for Okinawa that such legitimating recognition would bring, but also because the inclusion of cultural assets in the ICH list has been demonstrated as a factor producing, and exponential rise of tourism-related revenues. Intangible cultures harvest very tangible outcomes in the form of monetary returns. Many social actors, public and private, both in Okinawa and Japan, are well aware of the karate economic potentials still to develop. Continuing with this research line, the next section of this chapter studies the creation of an institutional karate tourism industry in Okinawa.

### **3.2. Consuming the Multiple Images of Karate: Homogeneization and Particularization in Cultural Capitalism.**

*Some men make long voyages and undergo the toils of journeying to distant lands for the sole reward of learning something hidden and remote. This eagerness attracts people to public shows, drives them to pry into everything that is closed, to inquire the most hidden things, to unearth the antiques, to hear of the customs of foreign peoples.*

*De Otio, Séneca*

In 2018 Okinawa held the 1<sup>st</sup> Okinawa International Karate Tournament, an event that involved 26.000 participants including athletes, staff, fans and accompanies. After seeing those results the head of Okinawa's Department of Culture, Tourism and Sports announced that there is a global market for "martial arts tourism" from which the prefecture must benefit economically taking further institutional policies and efforts. These statements did not define so much a starting point as the confirmation of a process in the making. Four years before a meeting at the Urasoe Industry Promotion Center had discussed the necessity of "create a strong organization to promote karate" and "strengthen the authority and trust for Okinawan karate in order to create the brand." (Ryūkyū Shimpō 2014: n.p.).<sup>274</sup>

Throughout the last two decades, karate institutional organization in Okinawa has been undergoing important transformations, closely related to the internationalization of markets and the expansion of mass tourism. Such emerging circumstances are part of the post-industrial economies shift to the sectors of leisure and cultural consumption, which Japan has deeply embraced adopting the Nation Branding and Cool Japan economic and cultural policies. This 'Japan Brand Strategy' aim to establish a renewed vision on the international image of Japan and its culture "in order to increase global demand for Japanese products overseas and to use as a resource of symbolic power for inducing pro-

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<sup>274</sup> An initial study that provided the basis for this section was presented at the 14<sup>th</sup> European Association for Sociology of Sport Conference: The Values of Sport: Between Tradition and (Post)modernity, at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport of Charles University, Prague, in June 2017. The paper was entitled: "Traditional Values, Martial Arts Tourism and Nation Branding: The Case of Okinawan Karate"

Japanese sentiments especially in Asia” (Daliot-Bul 2009: 248-249). This planning incorporates and capitalizes on the global success of Japanese contemporary popular culture and the prestige of the national traditions to make them attractive assets monetizable through cultural industries and global tourism. The Japanese government sees tourism as a major force for increasing the international competitiveness of the national stagnant economy while contributing to local revitalization and place-based community development, with a relevant role reserved for sports tourism (Hinch, Ito 2017).

In this context, the worldwide appeal of karate conforms a precious resource for promoting tourism in Okinawa while asserting its status as a Japanese symbol. Due to the joint ambitions of the national government and the dominant economic sectors in Okinawa, the archipelago is planned to become one of the main poles of international tourism in Asia. Sports and cultural tourism are fundamental to this tourism design, and thus karate represents a unique opportunity to open up a market niche with a remarkable economic impact for Japan’s poorest prefecture. Over 3.000 karateka visit Okinawa per year (Hinch, Ito 2018), often accompanied by familiars and friends, and stay at the islands more than double when compared with those coming for sightseeing activities (9 to 3.71 days). These numbers are expected to surge thanks to the discipline first time Olympic Games participation in Tokyo 2020.

The regional and national governments have realized karate importance for tourism, and therefore since the beginning of the millennium policymakers had entered the previously ‘informal’ karate tourism field in Okinawa, with growing intensity from 2010 onwards. In the course of the last two decades the official architecture of karate as I have mentioned before, has given birth to the “Karate day” (25th of October) in 2005, the establishment of the Okinawa Traditional Karate Liaison Bureau (OTKLB) in 2011, the founding of the Okinawa Prefecture Karate Promotion Division in 2016, and the opening of the Okinawa Karate Information Center (OKIC) and the Okinawa Karate Kaikan in 2017.

To offer a comprehensive analysis of the formulation of karate tourism, this section gives first a succinct but concise outline of the historical place of Okinawa as a prime tourist destination since Japan’s postwar recovery, providing some examples on early karate touristifications and commodifications. Then examines the private and

institutionalized marketing of a karate martial brand in Okinawa over the last ten years, attending to the sectors of martial arts tourism, sports tourism, contents tourism, and heritage tourism, and the ways they intermingle with Japan's cultural policies. Finally, the conclusion considers how the creation of a karate tourism niche in Okinawa despite aligning with the Japanese state strategies is subjected to transnational processes that operate both as dangers and opportunities for disseminating local views of the Okinawa karate tradition.

### **3.2.1. Marketing a Martial Brand: An introduction to Okinawan Tourism and Karate**

It was in 1995 at The Greater Ryūkyū Festival Kingdom (*Dai Ryūkyū - Matsuri O-Koku*), coinciding with the 50<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the Pacific War end, that the Prefectural Governor Ota Masahide proclaimed that Okinawa would be Japan's 'Tourism Prefecture' (*kanko ritsuken*). His public speech, that did not fail to mention karate, was adorned with an ode to the historic-cultural charms and natural beauties of Okinawa, all part of the touristic landscape of the islands:

This place overflows in a bounty of sun and sea,  
A verdurous isle of eternal youth where people are naturally kindhearted;  
The *sanshin* resonates and drums to beat out the heavens,  
A tropical rhythm shakes Mother Earth;  
From the heroics of karate to dance, dragon boat races, and tug-of-war,  
And then the bejeweled splendor of royal culture;  
Young and old alike are cheerfully spirited and full of health,  
To a long life! (Figal 2012: 232).

Indeed, Okinawa is an essential element of Japan's touristic architecture. The figures provided by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) show that 31.19 million international visitors came to Japan in 2018, making of the country the 11<sup>th</sup> tourist destination in the world with a 10-year average growth of 14%. By its part, Japan Tourism Agency (JTA) data shows that Naha Airport -Okinawa's capital- is the 6<sup>th</sup> port of entry for overseas visitors in Japan (5.4% of the total) and very close to becoming the 4<sup>th</sup> after Narita, Kansai, and Haneda mega airports. According to the '2016 McKinsey International Tourist Survey', Okinawa ranks second in the western tourist awareness of

Japan's major tourist assets, branded as a beach and resort destination. Once possible visitors without previous knowledge are informed of the characteristics of Okinawa for travel, the islands almost equal Mount Fuji in touristic appeal.

Not by coincidence then, Okinawa has been at the center of Japan's tourism plans since its reversion to the Japanese administration after the postwar American occupation (1945-1972). These plans developed in two broad phases: first with domestic tourism orientations, and second, from 2002 onwards, by making of Okinawa a gateway node in the Asia-Pacific region for attracting international visitors. Yet at the early stages of the postwar economic recovery, it was clear for the authorities that the geographical location and subtropical conditions of Okinawa set the perfect stage for an island resort destination based in the "3s tourist spot": sun, sand, and sea (Toyokawa and Sakamoto 2017). Before the reversion battlefield tourism still represented the main tourist activity in Okinawa. However, already in the 60s it was evident the interest of middle-class Japanese to travel to Okinawa, and in 1962 the Okinawa Tourism Association produced a diagnosis report on the main environmental assets, cultural properties, and Okinawan customs that must prompt tourism, among them karate (Figal 2008: 89-90). During that decade the first resorts were constructed and Japanese airlines targeted deluxe markets by advertising

overseas travel starting from Okinawa" and "shopping for luxury foreign goods such as whiskey, watches, cameras, and jewelry, all much cheaper than on the Japanese mainland", which converted souvenirs in the 60% of their total travel expenditure (Tada 2015: 294).

Soon after Okinawa began to be publicized as 'Japan's Secret Paradise' or the 'Japanese Hawaii', an appellation that beyond a tropicalizing homonym stands for an actual model for tourism growth, introduced in the 1969 "Tropical Tourism Base Plan". This blueprint was later incorporated by the Japanese Government to set up a "unique tropical zone in Japan" (Tada 2015: 294).

On these grounds, since 1972, when the Okinawa per capita income was 58% of the national average, consecutive 10-year plans were implemented to improve the situation of the prefecture and reduce the 'economic disparity' with mainland. Post-reversion Okinawan economy was defined by a "3k system": public investment (*kokyo jigyo*), tourism (*kanko*), and bases (*kichi*) (McCormack 1998), a structure of dependence

determined by the US-Japan geopolitical alliance at the East China Sea.<sup>275</sup> Japan's agenda sought to shift the economic orientation of its southern peripheral islands, downsizing the dominance of public expenditure by fiscal transfers and the weight of the military base related activities (from 15% in 1972 to 5% in 1987), while progressively increasing tourism income. The easing on the traveling restrictions to Okinawa represented the first rise of domestic tourism going from 200.000 Japanese visitors in 1971 to 740.00 in 1973. The 75' Okinawa Marine Expo acted as a first inflection point popularizing the regional peculiarities and its cultural and natural assets, and tourist visitors multiplied next to 2 million that year (Nguyen 2017: 7).

For Japanese travel agents, Okinawa could be presented as a perfect comfortable mixture of affinity (geographical, cultural) and exoticism. This conceptual reframing also transformed the dominant tourism in Okinawa, reversing a negatively charged postwar tourism (mainly driven by people who had lost their beloved ones in the Battle of Okinawa) into the leisure images of paradise beaches and far-away beauty experiences. Japan's economic bubble of the '80s brought many infrastructural inversions and private investments to Okinawa, hence resort hotels, leisure beaches, golf courses, shopping centers, and theme parks began to flourish. At the same time, the prefecture became a favorite destination for school trips.

The economic stagnation of the 90s (also known as Japan's lost decade) did not affect mass tourism in the islands, because Japan was covered by a movement known as the "Okinawa boom" Okinawa Boom. The Okinawa boom, coinciding with Governor Ota mandate (1990-1998), was an Okinawan cultural renaissance. A "celebration of difference" founded in local festivals, language, dance, ritual and other cultural expressions still resonating today, that characterizes Okinawa "as peaceful, linguistically unique, a marine paradise, culturally distinct (from mainland Japan), an excellent

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<sup>275</sup> Okinawa is put in a startling paradoxical but immensely convenient socio-political situation in relation to its contouring into the Japanese nation-state. It combines the terrible inheritance of one of the worst WWII battles and the stupefying presence of the 73.8% US military bases land in Japan -being the prefecture only 0.6% of national territory-, with the touristic images of a peaceful and natural-healing paradise.

investment choice, an ‘international’ community, the home of karate, and so on” (Allen 2008: 198).<sup>276</sup>

The Okinawa boom crystallized in representational images disseminated by cultural industries products (music, theater, cinema, anime, videogames...) and other commodities consumed along Japan. Correlated to the enormous significance of the psychosocial ‘*furusato* boom’, and ‘healing boom’ dominating the Japanese tourism of the time (Robertson 1995; Kühne 2012)<sup>277</sup>, mainlanders re-discovered a “native” Ryūkyūan culture and its appealing’s, which added up to the natural wonders of the islands to mature the archipelago as a top national destination. Thus, the Okinawa boom partially re-produced a romanticized image of the traditional Okinawan culture framed by the tropical allusions. It even supposed a laudatory re-conception of the “Okinawa time”, hitherto stigmatized and now an enviable notion of a more slow-life style “free from the manic intensity of everyday life in the metropolitan centers of Japan.” (Nelson 2008: 236).

The Okinawa boom tourist-oriented facets were especially driven by the 1992 opening of the Shuri Castle Park and the 1993 airing of the *Ryūkyū no Kaze* (“Winds of The Ryūkyūs”) historical drama Tv series, in which martial arts appear noticeably, by Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK), the only public broadcaster of the country. This conjunction “was not coincidental; both the TV series and the park served as mutual promotions for each other as the castle complex was used for sets throughout the series.” (Figal 2012: 157). The current karate touristification trend framed by cultural tourism seeks to associate both with the iconic power of Shuri Castle and the narratives of the Okinawan cultural difference already showcased in *Ryūkyū no Kaze*, historically grounded but consumer-oriented reconstructed:

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<sup>276</sup> “pacifist Ryūkyū has no historical grounding and has been born and bred by contemporary Okinawan politics, especially under the administration of former governor Ōta Masahide (1990–1998), who, from a staunch antibase position and his own war experience, established a number of peace promotion initiatives, including a new branch in the prefectural government dedicated to peace promotion.” (Figal 2012: 153).

<sup>277</sup> Literally “old village”, the idea of *furusato* introduces affective images of traditional social relations and rural landscapes. Interlaced with tourism, nation-making, and driven by nostalgia, *furusato* is the search of a traditional, authentic Japan in regional expressions. Involves the sense of living in a historical and meaningful past for urbanite tourists overwhelmed by rapid industrialization. By its part, the “healing boom” and the “migration to Okinawa boom” of both young and retiring Japanese were amplified by the real estate and tourist industries.



Echoing tourist guides past and present, what are considered defining elements of this cultural difference are overtly displayed throughout the series. Items of clothing, hair styles, language, sacred sites (*utaki*) and priestesses (*noro*), turtleback tombs, shamisen (*sanshin*), song, karate, and so on are prominently featured during the story. (Figal 2012: 160).



Figure 19 - Karate and kobudō training at Ryūkyū no Kaze series. NHK, 1993.

To record *Ryūkyū no Kaze* a huge studio reproducing the Ryūkyū Kingdom's capital in the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries was built in the Yomitan area, at the central part of Okinawa island. Afterward, this set was transformed in the theme park Murasaki Mura, where now sits the International Karate Study Centre. The center is a quite large facility with a training hall, offices and dormitories that promotes itself in concordance with the typical touristic gaze of Okinawa:

“The International Karate Study Centre (IKSC) is a dojo complex built in a traditional Okinawan style (...) The IKSC is located within the Murasaki Mura theme park where you can try various traditional Okinawan arts and crafts. We are also about 200m from the beach where you can enjoy the beautiful emerald green seas of Okinawa. Various marine activities can also be arranged.” (International Karate Study Center 2019: n.p.).

*Ryūkyū no Kaze*, which is based on a homonym novel of 1992 and was re-aired in 1997, situates the action in the time of the 1609 Japanese Satsuma clan invasion of the Ryūkyū Kingdom. Strictly speaking, perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of Ryūkyū’s martial arts because karate neither as a defined corpus of styles and techniques or, of course, the mere image of a white *gi* black-belt karateka existed. What probably could be found was a collection of systematized forms to be applied by the kingdom’s military corps, as well as less structured regional and familiar traditions. The Ryūkyūs martial arts were nurtured by multiple and diverse sources, combining in-islands systems with forms learned from other geographies of South and East Asia. The Ryūkyū Kingdom was a highly transactional maritime culture and its proper to acknowledge that Ryūkyūan martial arts developed in this framing. If one visits the Matsuyama Park in Naha will find a monument erected in 1987 to Higaonna Kanryō (1853-1915) and Miyagi Chōjun (1888-1953), two renowned karate masters. Close to there in the same park stands another monument from 1992, the sculpture of a boat, dedicated to the 36 families that came from the Chinese region of Fujian in 1392 and settled at the Ryūkyūs. Those Fujianese migrants are said to have had introduced Chinese martial arts in Okinawa. Although it can be subject to discussion, today some karate tours define this last spot as one of the ‘karate birthplaces’.



Figure 21 - The Monument to Higaonna and Miyagi at Matsuyama Park (1987). Source: The author, 2018.



Figure 21 - Kume Village Birthplace Monument dedicated to the '36 families' at Matsuyama Park (1992). Source: The author, 2018.

Therefore, thanks to the Okinawa boom and the tourism and cultural industries, during the 90s a re-staged, revitalized and distinctive Okinawa culture was installed in the Japanese popular mind, fixing the islands as a preferential desire for Japanese travelers. National visitors raised steadily from around 2 million at the beginning of the 80s to 4.5 million in 2000. However, early in this new decade, resort-centered tourism showed the first signs of saturation, and the government actions targeted “new tourism markets from abroad and moved itself away from resort tourism and into business, education, and cultural forms of tourism.” (Nguyen 2017: 11).

The prefectural tourism plans replicated the national policies aiming to build up Japan as a world-leading nation in cultural industries and tourism, and Okinawa as an international bridge to Asia and the rest of the World. This article will further explore how within this global-bridged scheme a special place is reserved for karate. Of the nearly 10 million visitors that Okinawa received the past year (2019) -numbers that rival with Hawaii- 30% were from overseas. Available data show that since 2013 foreign tourism has exploded in the islands, going from 300,000 to around 3 million international visitors in 2019. The vast majority of them arrived from other East Asian countries: Taiwan (28%), South Korea (27%), China (21%), and Hong Kong (10%), with citizens from the United States (4%) accounting as the first non-Asian visitors. Here it is important to remark that



Figure 22 - A Japan Airlines (JAL) Boeing 737 with the logo 'Okinawa Birthplace of Karate' at Naha Airport.

United States karateka, with a notable presence of ex-military personnel formerly destined to the archipelago, tops among the repeating foreign tourist in Okinawa.

Nowadays the foreign tourist demand growth in Okinawa continually outperforms the domestic (14.2% to 1.2%) and the overall set of tourism revenues beat again a 5-year consecutive record peaking 725.1 billion yen in 2018 (approximately 6.8 billion dollars). Nonetheless, the sustainability of a tourism economic model is a major local concern, both from the ecological and economic point of view. Okinawa is a small island group with scant ecosystemic resources and a population of only 1.45 million that is already receiving almost 10 million visitors per year. Hence several worries raise about the convenience of continue branding Okinawa as an international tourist destination.

The pushing issues of tourism massification in Okinawa have produced extensive literature: McCormack speaks of “concrete islands” (1998) (in Okinawa the construction industry stills practically double the national average, 10.7 to 5.6%). Kakazu refers to “Cheap, Near and Short”, as the leading slogan for appealing to the East Asian tourists (2017). Murray explores the irremediable unsustainability of the “Okinawa tourism imperative” (2017), because of the increasing costs of the energy demand and the eroding of the ecological systems, as natural assets continue to be by large the main motivation for traveling to Okinawa (Toyokawa, Sakamoto 2017). As happens with many other travel destinations, Okinawa is very sensitive to global events. Tourism numbers were highly affected by the post-2008 banking crisis, the surge of SARS and other new types of influenza, or natural disasters as the 2011 earthquake and the subsequent Fukushima nuclear accident. On the other hand, mass tourism resort in East Asia is an extremely demanding and competitive sector. The limits and dangers of the tourism industry structure in Okinawa were already acknowledged by the 2010 Prefectural Government Plan that proposed to take “proactive measures” and “aggressive approaches” based on “sophisticated” ecotourism and internationalization. As a result, the government tourism initiative is now centered on developing a wide range of cultural tourism inflows, the consumption of locally produced goods, and nature-related luxury tourism as viable alternatives for the present-day configuration of the Okinawan economy.

As we see, karate has been a common item in the set of iconographies guiding the Okinawa touristification process, mixing with the images of a marine, peaceful, rich indigenous culture. Moreover, at the present internationalization stage of tourism in

Okinawa, the local martial art is expected to become a valued sector itself. Accordingly, the local government has decided to implement diverse actions to reenact globally Okinawa as ‘the birthplace of karate’ and thus bring greater numbers of visitors and revenues to the prefecture.

### **3.2.2. Recentring the Cartographies of Karate: Martial Arts Tourism in Okinawa**

Martial arts tourism has produced abundant scholarly works (Cynarski 2012; Cynarski, Sieber 2007; Cynarski, Swider 2017; Miller 2010); arising special attention in Korea and China (Cho 2001; Li et al. 2012; Shi-hong 2012; Su 2016). In the same manner, martial arts marketing and its possibilities are raising the attention of governments, companies and academic economic fields (Jason 2017; Kim, Zhang 2015; Ko 2002; Ko, Yang 2009). The martial arts tourist travels specifically for “attaining new knowledge and honing skills” as the “prevailing mentality claims that a martial artist can improve his or her craft faster and easier in its place of origin.” However, it is frequent that beyond the training purposes they

may cultivate an interest in other cultural expressions such as music, dance, or the local religion. Besides training, these tourists prioritize visiting legendary cultural sites within the country, perhaps including those that figure heavily in the lore of their particular martial art; examples would be temples, training facilities, masters’ homes, or natural attractions. (Miller, 2010: 412).

From this perspective martial arts tourism encompasses at least three overlapping types of cultural tourism: sports tourism, contents tourism, and heritage tourism. Sports and sports tourism have been both reason the result of the circulation of images and goods on a global scale, or in Gomes words:

“the fact that the sports world has been now taken over by strong financial motivations has largely strengthened this correlation over the last two decades: the sports-vision of the world as the key metaphor for the globalization.” (Gomes 2010: 222).

In this regard, combat sports derived from traditional martial arts conjugate the globalized image of international practices and championships with an exclusive nationalistic/localistic image supported on the genuineness of their origin place. This



duality of martial arts as a modern sportive phenomenon coexisting and bounded to diverse East Asian traditions explain their special appeal to sports tourism, because “travel and tourism are also an appropriation of the world, underlaid with symbolic appreciation and values.” (Schwark 2007: 119). Therefore, martial arts tourism takes part in sports tourism acculturation but allocating distinctive emphasis on authenticity. Indeed, martial arts styles and schools as transnational communities are irremediably built up upon a legitimatizing and statutory network, in karate’s case Okinawan (and/or Japanese) masters and places.



*Figure 23 - Traditional karate exhibition at Kokusai Dori, Naha main shopping Street. Source: The author, 2018.*

According to Cynarski one of the main subtypes of martial arts tourism is the travel for cognitive, educational, and self-realisation purposes such as attending classes, seminars examinations, competitions, galas, demonstrations, meetings and other types of events (Cynarski 2012: 14), usually related to the own branch or school practice and dependent on the lineage. Those kinds of in-site assistances require the communication

with local individuals and communities, comprising cultural (particular worldviews on body comprehension and movement), social (socialization with residents) and natural (appropriation of the spatial environment and cultural landscapes) dimensions. Martial arts tourism also incorporates unique added value to sports tourism by offering a singular economy of symbolic goods in Veblen's terms (1912): a sumptuary layer of iconic references, ostensible aestheticized practices, and conspicuous lifestyles for the practitioner's figurative auto-production.

This principle of intensified anesthetization of the social practices excited by post-industrial capitalism prompts martial arts and their commodified consumption into the domain of leisure and entertainment, transforming an old stoic hard-working self-realization pedagogy into modern fashionable habits, expressible through goods and cultural practices.<sup>278</sup> Such behavioral shift is useful to explain the current apparition of multimedia karate-oriented contents produced in Okinawa. Among them, for instance, historical manga: "The Seven Samurai of Okinawa Karate" (Ryūkyū Shimpō, 2015); theater plays: "Okinawa Karate Garden - Ship of the Ryūkyū" (Okinawa Culture Council, 2018); radio programs: "Atsumare! Karate kids" (Ryūkyū Broadcasting Corporation, 2019); or women starring *doramas*: "Ryūkyū Karate Idol TERAKA" (QAB Ryūkyū Asahi Broadcasting, 2020). Hence, by the local manufacture of entertainment productions and leisure experiences, Okinawan karate is also entering the commercial space of contents tourism.

Contents tourism (*kontentsu tsurizumu*) theories precisely originated in Japan and were proactively adopted by the government economic and cultural agenda (Seaton, Yamamura 2015). Underpinned on the expressions of contemporary Japanese popular culture in media (manga, anime, films, videogames, etc.) content tourism draws upon product narratives, characters and places to attract fans to pilgrimage sites:

it is hoped by the government that contents, tourism and the two working in concert as contents tourism will generate massive additional revenues for Japan. The government has gone beyond thinking of contents as an export business, but rather now considers contents to be the first stage of a national strategy that invites

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<sup>278</sup> However, we cannot forget that karate has been understood also in the past as a way of gaining social distinction, no matter if we are speaking of Fujianese merchants living in the Ryūkyūs at the verge of the XX century, the first Okinawan masters established in Japan prior to WWII, or even Japanese politicians of the 80s and 90s. What changes is the way that karate culture is consumed and performed by individuals in relation with the market production.

tourists to visit Japan as the site where those contents originated. (Seaton, Yamamura 2015: 7).

Three main players take part in contents tourism: fans, local authorities, and contents business. Fans perform the act of consumption through visiting places defined as important for the community, being in Okinawan karate case either the Karate Kaikan or sites spread across the island's geography, like the previously mentioned monument to Higaonna Kanryō and Miyagi Chōjun, or the former emplacement of the Okinawa Normal School in Shuri, where renowned masters like Itosu Ankō (1831-1915), Hanashiro Chōmo (1869-1945) or Yabu Kentsu (1866-1937) taught karate in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The second actor, local authorities, benefit from the tourism business, not only by direct and indirect revenues but also by exercising cultural diplomacy through the circulation of a global public image, in this situation the marketing of Okinawa as 'the land of karate'. Finally, the private sector of contents business and tour operators, while relying on the information and resources administered by the authorities and attending to markets demands, supply experiences and items by which fans will be compelled to consume the particular culture.

In this sense, small private companies begun to offer karate tours in Okinawa ahead of the prefectural administration. For example, *Challenge Okinawa*, founded in 2014 by the owner of the famous *Dojo Bar* in Naha, invites to "bring together locals and visitors in challenges that unite the spirit and bring to life the old Okinawan saying *ichariba chodei*: 'once we meet we are family'."

By its part, *Ageshio Japan*, a company dedicated exclusively to karate tourism appeared in 2017, advertises itself as "Japan's only karate specialist travel agency in Okinawa". Their packages range from the 6.000 yen (50 euro) cost of a dojo lesson to the 275.000 yen (2.295 euro) for a 14-day full Okinawa karate experience. The multiple day trips are adaptable to non-training companions, offering alternative activities to discover traditional Okinawan culture like *shīsā* making, *bingata*, *sanshin*, *awamori*, dances, tea ceremony, etc. and resort type activities like *onsen*, yoga, and spa.<sup>279</sup> Aside from dojo

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<sup>279</sup> *Shīsā* are a pair of male-female lion dogs that are found all along the islands protecting houses, businesses, and buildings. *Bingata* is a typical form of textile pigmented production decorated with colorful patterns. *Sanshin* is an Okinawan tree cord instrument omnipresent in folk songs. *Awamori* is a



training courses, seminars, camps, and so on, *Ageshio Japan* organizes diverse “karate sightseeing” historical tours and pilgrimage routes. Masters’ tombs and public monuments had been part of these tours, however since last year they have ceased to offer burial sites in their tours. Seemingly those visits were causing discomfort and displeasure to family members and direct karate students of the buried master, which accounts for some karate touristification problems and how they affect the local’s notions about their heritage. *Ageshio Japan* services are being diversified, offering Japanese lessons for karate, a “zen + karate” bundle at Shuri Kannon temple, and even karate and *kobudō* experiences outside the main island, visiting Yaeyama or Zamami in pursuit of further tropical beauty, local food, craft arts, and other slow-life imaginaries and commonplaces of the touristic gaze in Okinawa.<sup>280</sup>

The government-sponsored initiatives, on the other side, seem to aspire to put more weight in the heritage angle of karate. The Okinawa Karate Kaikan and the Okinawa Dentokaratedō Shinkokai (“Society for the Advancement of the Traditional Okinawa Karate”, formed in 2008) last year launched the ‘experimental’ package “Karate Taiken Program” (Karate Experience Program, 2019) spotlighting “watch, know and experience” to “discover the spirituality and courtesy of karate”. This heritage trend is in concordance with the Prefectural plans of achieving the inclusion of the Okinawan martial art in the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage, a porpoise which has meant the creation of a special committee formed by top members of the aforementioned association. The institutional heritage narrative, as we have seen in previous sections, links karate with local rites and customs like the tug-of-war and the dragon boat races that, beyond supporting the UNESCO candidature, attract themselves lots of tourist attention. ‘Heritage karate’ is also connected with the Okinawan UNESCO World Heritage officially registered in 2000 like the Shuri Castle and the Shikinaen royal gardens, and archeological remains of older stone fortifications (*gusuku*) conserved from the 14th-15th centuries, times of competing feudal lords (*aji*) in the Ryūkyūs. Naturally, private

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distinctive Okinawan alcoholic beverage distilled from long rice. *Onsen* are the traditional Japanese hot spring baths.

<sup>280</sup> In contrast *Challenge Okinawa* offers a more modest ‘Jungle Adventure Day’, and an all-you-can eat and drink ‘Beach Karate Training and Barbecue Party’.

companies also take advantage of these World Heritage sites for captivating karate tourists to Okinawa.

Framed in this way karate falls into the category of heritage tourism, a core of cultural tourism with specific particularities. Heritage tourism is the contact

with cultural heritage through the visit or consumption of heritage goods and services. It comprises visits to historic cities or towns, monuments, worship and civil heritage buildings, historic gardens, industrial heritage sites, archaeological sites, and museums, among other heritage attractions. It also includes the consumption of goods and services directly linked to them: souvenirs, handicrafts, special tours, etc. (Bonet, 2013: 387-388).

As we can observe, karate heritage tourism to a good degree juxtaposes with sports tourism and contents tourism. All of them can contribute to developing the cultural capital of an individual based on the location authenticity and its perception “as part of personal heritage”, leading therefore to specific behavioral patterns. (Bonet, 2013: 389). Karate represents a clear niche for heritage tourism, which is an important topic for Okinawan studies (Casey 2013; Figal, 2008, 2012; Hunter, 2012; Lorthanavanich, 2013); which has been also studied by its direct connection with East Asian martial arts (Raimondo 2011; Su 2016).

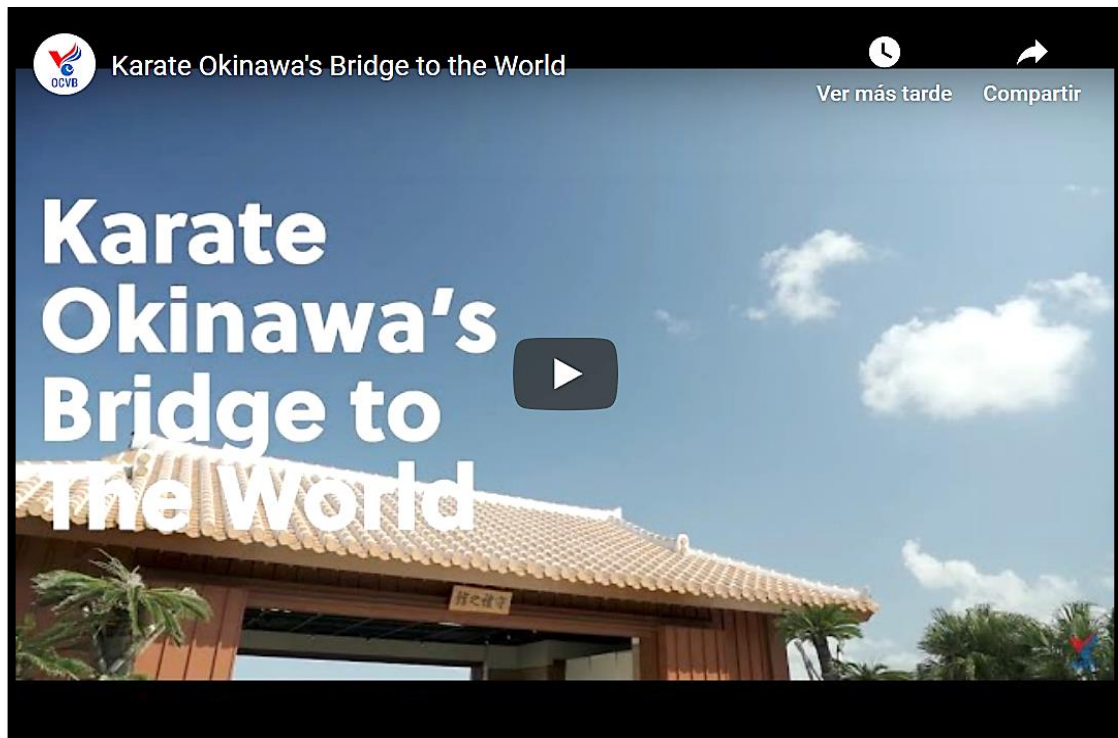


Figure 24 - A comparison of karate t-shirts at the Shuri Castle Park Shop and the Karate Kaikan one. Notice that in the first photo at Shuri Castle Park we read a pro-japanese ‘karate-do’ message in big capital letters, with a lifestyle wordplay and a much smaller typography for ‘Okinawan’; whereas at the Kaikan the return local origins are utterly accentuated. Source: The author, 2018.

Developed as a mass phenomenon in the 70s and 80s, heritage tourism is an integral part of the official construction of the World Heritage system. In good reason UNESCO World Heritage is directly connected to tourism by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Although demonstrated as a way of economic development in macroeconomic terms, the connivance of tourism and cultural heritage conform a delicate issue raising controversies about the place of local communities, the role of the nation-state, and fears about commercial banalization and alienation of cultural assets. Henceforth, the official commodification and sportification of karate culture is not a minor debate within local Okinawa karate spheres, implying questions about property, autonomy, legitimacy, and the historic memory of the Okinawa-Japan relations.

Actually, the master lines guiding the Okinawan government-sponsored professionalization of a karate tourism industry derive from the application of national-level directives. The 2019 edition of the Japan Tourism Association (JTA) “White Paper on Tourism” systematizes several measures to situate this sector as a “core industry” of the country. The document highlights, among others, the “drastic opening of attractive public facilities and infrastructure to the public”, as in Karate Kaikan case; the “formation and development of world-class DMOs’ (destination marketing and/or management organizations), such as the Okinawa Convention & Visitors Bureau (OCVB), a public-private body appointed as manager of the Kaikan; and the “development of cultural assets as tourism resources”, namely the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage karate candidature. Such touristic developments of karate assemble equally with the Japan Sports Agency campaign for martial arts tourism promotion (Hinch, Ito 2018).

Meant to become the mecca of karate practitioners around the world, the Karate Kaikan, supposes the quintessence of Okinawa karate branding. The inauguration was covered by local and national newspapers and achieved notable repercussions in karate webpages and international magazines specialized in martial arts. The touristic impact expected from the Kaikan was perfectly synthesized by the Spanish magazine *El Budoka 2.0* in an article that covering the opening of the facility was entitled: “Karate en Okinawa. ¡Más fácil que nunca! (Karate in Okinawa. Easier than ever!)” Although indicated to serve as a cultural house for Okinawan karate, including a remarkable museum, and a highly valuable research library, the Kaikan construction also clearly responds to tourism planning.



*Figure 25 - Video footage of the official campaign 'Karate Okinawa's Bridge to the World' highlighting the Karate Kaikan outdoors 'Special Dojo', in traditional red-tiled Okinawan style. Notice the 'tropicalizing' young palms disposed around the recently constructed building, which however are related to karate culture by its properties to construct wood weapons like bo. Source: Visit Okinawa Japan - Okinawa Convention & Visitors Bureau (OCVB).*

The Karate Kaikan is managed by the OCVB a general incorporated foundation established in 1996 that is also in charge of The Former Japanese Navy Underground Headquarters Park (place of the Okinawa WWII memorial and museum), and the Busena Marine Park. The OCVB defines itself as

the only unified public and private sector promotional body in Okinawa that integrates tourism (...) to fulfill the varying travel preferences of the Japanese people and to respond to the fierce market competition with the leading tourist destinations in Japan and abroad. (Okinawa Convention & Visitors Bureau 2019: n.p.).

This DMO has been in charge of the "Okinawa Sports Islands" initiative that basically conceives Okinawa as a giant sports resort, and the "Be Okinawa- Visit Okinawa" internet campaign in which karate appears prominently as "Okinawa's Bridge to the World". The *Be.Okinawa* webpage highlights the worldwide appeal of karate and includes professional photos and video intercalating images of prominent Okinawan

masters and all-condition international karateka exhibiting their art in the main streets of Naha. Totally engaged in developing the synergies between sports tourism and martial arts tourism in Okinawa, in 2018 the OCVB hosted an event for celebrating the establishment of the Okinawa Branch of The Japan Travel and Tourism Association (JTTA). There, karate was the one and only protagonist with a lecture named “Sports Island Japan: From the World to Okinawa through Sports and Martial Arts Tourism”, and a Panel Discussion called “Sports Island Okinawa: To Become a Sports Island Okinawa Selected by the World Through Martial Arts Tourism”.

### **3.2.3. Globalized Martial Arts, Transnational Markets, and the Limits of Local Agency**

In the previous section I have introduced how the growth of a karate business industry and its shaping is a topic of tension and debate within Okinawan karate circles. The debate in fact, goes back to the commencement of the expansion of international tourism in Okinawa and the strategic governmental advancements over karate tourism. Yet in 2011 the Okinawa General Bureau (OGB), a regional branch of Japan’s Prime Minister Cabinet Office, organized a symposium of the “Okinawa Sense - Culture related Industry” group in which the possibilities of karate for strengthening the Okinawan economy were discussed. Around 250 people attended the event, including “the elite of the Okinawan karate and representatives from local universities and the Okinawa Prefectural Government”. The panel speakers underscored that “has never been and will never be about making local Okinawan karate a business”, but to acknowledge the increasing numbers of non-Okinawan people attracted by traditional karate instead of sports karate. At the symposium the circumstances and challenges of Okinawan karate were delineated meticulously:

Facing this situation, Okinawa - as the birthplace of karate - definitely needs to furthermore promote itself and strengthen its actual international network composed of many traditional martial artists. Okinawan masters need to protect and polish the cultural treasure that is karate. By karate I mean the martial arts that were created on an island with their tradition and philosophy. This is actually one if not the main purpose of this concept. Karate has already been supporting the Okinawan economy with the visit of many foreign karatekas through many years, tournaments and seminars. Now there is a need of really organizing the local environment so that more people could come and experience and/or

rediscover Okinawan Karate and *Kobudō*. By this I mean not only building a karate hall (a request and desire from many local masters) but also creating an official front office for Okinawan karate and *kobudō* (physically and virtually through the Internet). (Okinawa Media Planning Co., Ltd. 2011: n.p.).

Although accelerating throughout the last decade, the globalized commodification of karate goes back to the second part of the XX century, acting to fix it more like a Japanese than an Okinawan icon. Besides, the construction of the Prefecture as an international destination and the re-construction of karate as a national asset responds to Japan's objective of becoming a tourism-oriented cultural state in a global contending field of nation branding and cultural diplomacy. In this scheme, and as implied in the former declaration at the symposium, Okinawan karate is, to a considerable extent, a passive protagonist of processes that even outpace the national level.

The following example will illustrate this statement. The World Karate Federation (WKF) “sole governing body for sport Karate in the world”, and only instance recognized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), has its headquarters in Madrid and is presided by a Spaniard, Antonio Espinós. This strong organization comprises 190 countries with their respective national federations, including the Japan Karate Federation (JKF), and gathers around 96.8% of the total worldwide karate affiliates: 10 million karateka (remember that Okinawa entire population is about 1.45 million). The WKF televises live The Karate World Championships as “sports entertainment” to over 120 countries via satellite; profusely using the hashtag *#karatelife* in its social media. Okinawa cannot declare karate ‘World Championships’ because it’s a competence exclusive to the IOC and therefore the WKF. The World Karate Day (17<sup>th</sup> June) determined by this federation to manifest “karate’s harmony and singularity” and commemorate the practitioners’ “unity and identity” differs from the day appointed in Okinawa (25<sup>th</sup> October). Of the four main Okinawan karate styles, only one, *Gōjū-ryū*, is recognized by the WKF. Such is the scale of the forces that traditional Okinawan karate has to counter-image.

The question is then a matter of *realpolitik*; in other words, about the possibilities of karate regional actors to profile and benefit from national and global socio-economic processes that, despite built upon this Okinawan heritage, outreach their control. The construction of an Okinawa karate tourism industry is conditioned by global factors and

determined by national policies and instruments. This government-regulated plan for the global branding of Okinawan karate may seek to rebalance the equilibrium of power over karate, and results from the institutional acknowledgment that this martial art has been, in fact, a common element of the Okinawan touristic landscape and gaze, especially for millions of karate fans.

A heightened worldwide consumption of karate as an Okinawan martial art, through tourism, must redefine the distribution of financial revenues and incomes reporting increasing benefits to Japan's most southern prefecture. Karate is a global public asset that nonetheless gains distinction and monetary value as far as it can be associated with the authenticity of its origins. Promoting Okinawa karate tourism will have a network effect, making that the more people recognize karate as Okinawan, the more valuable it becomes in economic terms.

As exposed by this section, economic competition in the professional organized karate tourism sector was started by private small companies. Despite its late arrival, the entry of government partnered business initiatives is incrementing its institutional velocity, apparently less as a regulatory response than as a quasi-monopolistic approach. After all, what is at stake is which actors and territories will benefit most from the global commercial exploitation of karate.

Karate appears to the eyes of the regional and central governments as a neat tourism niche that can drive economic development and local revitalization. However, defining and promoting Okinawa as 'the birthplace of karate', and karate as Okinawan cultural tourism, must fulfill certain demands that imply acts of declassification and reclassification. It entails a backward re-invention of the tradition, that is to say, the recognition and display of karate as a local heritage, a view that to a great measure has been bypassed until now. This rebranding process necessary unveils discomforts about autonomy, authenticity, and historic memory between the Okinawan conceptions of this martial art and the Japanese ones, bringing in at the same time confluent antagonisms on general Japan-Okinawa relations.

It seems that karate as sports tourism is the axis supporting the Japanese state's attempts to oversize the national modernity upon the local tradition, blur its connotations and depict a 'depolitized' significant. On the contrary one must say that such articulation constructs a truly politized one. Sports karate presents a peaceful cleansed metanarrative

that lines up not only with Japan's national interests regarding the Okinawan tradition; but conveniently and mutually with supranational institutions as the World Karate Federation and mega-events like the Olympic games, which promote themselves via sports as a transnational culture of peace. Hereof Okinawa karate tourism may end up instilling a re-production of the hegemonic image of Okinawa as a historically peaceful and welcoming exotic land, without bearing further implications.

On the other hand, progressively since the 90s tourism in Okinawa, with its inexorable requirement of engaging and showcasing the difference for drawing the consumer's desire attention, has been a major factor in the emergence of an inner and outer sense of the prefectural particularities. Actual numbers show that Okinawa is reaching the potential global tourist, including of course millions of karate practitioners and fans. Obviously, the archipelago's popular and touristic characterizations rooted in the Okinawa boom serve national plans and private economic interests, commanded by real state inversions and the indigenous tropical resort stereotype. Still, these processes lead also to an awareness movement of the Okinawan cultural difference, enlivening appreciation and political actions that are breaking the reproduction of previous categories of perception and structural power relations.

From this perspective, the current construction of the martial arts tourism industry in Okinawa sets the basis for a new global cultural flow in market placing the archipelago as the emblematic land of karate, reterritorializing this Okinawan heritage, and conveying local history and criteria. The hegemonic narratives of karate disclosed by the Japanese state and the transnational organizations may tend to modulate and dampen the bulk of regional messages, but it is impossible to control completely the circulation of Okinawan karate images. The cultural markets prerequisite of 'discovering' the distinctness in conjunction with the multiplicity of information sources sharing and propagating Okinawan karate 'storyfied' messages opens an opportunity for the local actors to influence global discourses. Nevertheless, because the research here presented has its limitations, very pertinent questions remain to be clarified, for instance, how the institutional narratives of karate produced from the regional context are themselves selective, and while at the service of preservation also force further standardization. On another note, it is worth mentioning that scholars have begun to doubt the capacities of DMO to manage effectively the tourism industries in Japan (Nagai et al. 2018) which



supposes various uncertainties for the future of karate in Okinawa, precisely administered by this type of organization.

These pages have sought to expose and analyze the current creation of a karate tourism industry in Okinawa aiming to international visitors, and how it is grounded in the postwar early design of the prefecture as a first-class Japanese and international tourist destination. The approach here offered intends to be an example of the academic possibilities of crossing martial arts studies and Okinawan studies to produce fruitful outcomes for both disciplines; driving at the same time more academic attention to karate and Okinawa as reciprocal *explanandum* and *explanans*.

### **3.3. In a Lieu of Conclusion: Is Karate Cool?**

In *Soft Power: Superpowers* (2008), research on Japan's creative industries, Sugiura Tsutomu identified karate as a leading item at the global sphere. Karate was a salient keyword in the category of "Japanese Culture in General" according to the number of Google English-Language Web Sites, yielding a result of 32.607.000 references. The number of webpages dedicated to karate outnumbered those dedicated to the Gameboy, *Naruto*, *Dragon Ball Z*, a good group of Disney's productions, or *The Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings* movies. Sugiura calls the broad presence of Japan in the internet contents as the "third-generation Japanism, a phenomenon resembling the first generation of Japanism, which emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, and the second, which emerged during the 1950s and 1960s." (Sugiura 2008: 134). In this chapter we have seen how karate was a central element of this second wave of Japanism emerging in the postwar period.

By its part, at the same academic monograph, Kondo Seiichi, former Japanese Ambassador at the UNESCO (2006-2008) and Director General of the Japan Cultural Affairs Agency (2010-2013) recalls:

Speaking to Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro in 2004, a representative of the Iraqi karate world noted: 'We always invite sensei [teachers] from Japan', so as not to lose the spirituality of Japanese martial arts. Whether it is anime or martial arts, what lies in the background of their popularity is apparently an unarticulated affinity to the traditional Japanese culture and philosophy that continue to survive in the midst of modernization. (Kondo 2008: 200).

Unmistakably, for the international public karate has been a top 20<sup>th</sup> century referent of Japanese culture, expressing the continuity between tradition and modernity. As such, for the universal imaginary, karate signifies the articulation of tradition in the life-style of modern Japan, composing a national asset to be constantly displayed in public diplomacy and cultural industries. Two years before his encounter with the Iraqi karate representative Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro had “announced Japan’s new vision as an ‘Intellectual Property Nation.’” (Choo, 2012: 89), and the next year the Cabinet Office established the Intellectual Property Basic Law and the Intellectual Property Strategy Headquarters. The Intellectual Property Strategic Program of 2005 delineated The Japan Brand and Cool Japan strategies:

a new hybrid concept of a Japan Brand composed of Japanese content products largely responsible for the emerging global image of Cool Japan, as well as Japanese products that combine ‘Japanese creativity and tradition’, such as food, fashion and regional brands [...] to ‘dramatically expand the content business industry’ and to ‘promote a Japan Brand Strategy based on lifestyle’ (Daliot-Bul 2009: 252).

In July 2011 Japan’s Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) established the Creative Industries Division, also known as the Cool Japan Division, and in October 2011 officially introduced the Cool Japan campaign to the international markets. The initiative was meant to help “cultural and creative industries and producers to capitalize commercially on the worldwide popularity of Japanese manga, anime, film, Tv dramas, fashion, food, and other cultural products” (Craig, 2017: 8). Indeed, manga, anime, videogames and their respective cultural practices had been at the center of the Cool Japan strategy since its inception, receiving at the same time the vast majority of the academic attention. Nonetheless, as Kondo Seiichi words pointed out, martial arts, usually blending traditional and popular culture, are an important repository for developing the Cool Japan imagery. In this scheme, among the several Japanese martial arts, karate bears an unmatched iconic power.

Definitely, the Japanese government is well aware of the perennial potential of karate, to such a degree that the Okinawan martial art is since 2018 officially ‘cool’. As a matter of fact, karate is the only Okinawan cultural expression, the only martial art, and the only sport with a “Cool Japan Ambassador” designated by the Prime Minister Cabinet Office, in the person of the Okinawa Karate Information Center (OKIC) public relations

manager. In this regard, it is imperative to pay due attention to the fact that the Cabinet has chosen Okinawa as the heart of the Cool Japan campaign for karate.

Actually, the placing of karate as an element of the Cool Japan campaign is the result of a long process of bureaucratization that had already begun as early as 2010. Under the auspices of The Okinawa General Bureau (OGB), a regional branch of the Prime Minister Cabinet office, and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), the “Okinawa Sensitivity and Cultural Industry Study Group” was created. In the first meeting, the group discussed the recently adopted Cool Japan policies, stressing the defense of intellectual properties and their consistency “for establishing Japanese standards as global ones in designated strategic areas”, managing use cases like Okinawan karate. (Okinawa General Bureau 2010: n.p.).

In this chapter, I have confirmed how karate has participated in the set of cultural images associated with Okinawa while the archipelago was experiencing the emergence of tourism. Resulting from its place in the public imaginary, karate rapidly entered in national level Cool Japan tourism campaigns. In 2012 the All Nippon Airways online campaign “Is Japan Cool?” launched its Okinawa content.<sup>281</sup> As expected, ‘Ryūkyū Karate’ was featured among the 20 cool things list. Karate appeared again in ANA’s spectacular high-tech multi award-winning campaign “Dou – The Tangible Manner” (2018), focusing in the binomial Japanese traditional martial arts (*budō*) - performing and fine arts (*geidō*) to “explore how their spirit, technique, manner, and form transform intangible cultural heritage into ‘tangible’ culture” (ANA Airlines 2018: n.p.).<sup>282</sup>

The commodification of karate reveals the mixed status of this martial art. In the ANA ‘Dou – The Tangible Manner campaign a succinct allusion to Okinawa as the origin place of karate is all that is conceded, overriding any further reference to the local particularities of karate in Okinawa. Another airline, JAL, has currently two Boeing 737-

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<sup>281</sup> This Cool Japan ANA campaign has been feeding tourism contents dedicated to national destinations (only Tokyo and Kyoto in addition to Okinawa), Japanese traditions like *masturi* and diverse forms of craftsmanship, and contemporary popular culture as videogames, cosplay or *kawaii*.

<sup>282</sup> A karate elite competitor, Ayano Nakamura, computer rendered, performs passages of five katas, while a brief description of each form is given. The ‘about’ section reinforces the place of Gichin Funakoshi (1868 – 1957) as the leading -in fact the only- figure of karate. Moreover, the campaign text unmistakably asserts the Japanese (and international) definition of traditional karate, composed by the ‘four major schools’ *Shōtōkan*, *Gōju-ryū*, *Shitō-ryū*, and *Wadō-ryū*, overlooking naturally the Okinawan styles.

800 with the “Okinawa The Birth Place of Karate” logo, operating multiple routes in Japan. The day of the aircraft’s unveiling (2018) Okinawan born Kinyua Ryo, the main figure of the Japan National Team, and three-time world champion of the World Karate Federation (2014, 2016, 2018), offered a performance, appearing in the national news. However, the great efforts on Okinawan karate marketing can convey the wrong picture of the appreciation of karate in Japan. The same Kiyuna recently remarked to the Olympic News webpage that, despite its iconic value, karate is not really notorious in Japan:

To be honest karate is not the most popular sport in Japan, it is not very well known throughout Japan yet [...] To be an Olympic sport should be a great opportunity for karate, especially considering the ties of karate with the Japanese traditional culture. (International Olympic Committee News 2019: n.p.).

The Okinawan karate world champion public statement exemplifies the mixed reality and the disparities residing in karate as a valuable representant of Japanese culture inside Japan. We can have a better understanding of this phenomenon if we recall the analysis exposed in this chapter pages, especially in the immediate prewar and postwar periods.

Nonetheless, karate tripartite nature, in other words, traditional art, sport, and popular culture, makes a perfect testing ground for the state initiatives in this new re-branding of Japan. Seaton (2015) has explained how Japanese policymakers found several difficulties in defining a wide-range notion of “pop culture” (*poppu karucha*).<sup>283</sup> The fitting between tradition and modern that is between *ukiyo-e* and manga, for example, supposed the main struggle. I argue that karate, due to its cultural history, plasticity and elasticity, perfectly articulates an all-encompassing cultural icon for contemporary Japanese pop culture. Hence karate is again a prime asset for re-branding Japan internationally. Japanese culture, and its global consumption, is profoundly image-

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<sup>283</sup> “For many, the term ‘Japanese popular culture’ will generate images of manga, anime and J-pop. However, scholars, commentators and policy-makers - and not only in Japan - have struggled to articulate a broadly agreed definition of ‘popular culture’. A report commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2006) on the use of ‘pop culture’ in cultural diplomacy is emblematic of this problem. They defined ‘pop culture’ (*poppu karucha*) as ‘culture produced in the everyday lives of ordinary people’ (*ippan shimin ni yoru nichijo no katsudo de seiritsu shite iru bunka*), a definition which they admitted allowed forms categorized as ‘traditional culture’ by many, such as *ukiyo-e*, pottery and the tea ceremony, to be categorized as *poppu karucha* along with anime and manga. ‘Poppu’, in this usage, really means ‘popular’ as in ‘of the people’, which is slightly different from the vernacular usage of ‘pop culture’ in English, which tends toward culture that is ‘light’ rather than ‘heavy’ and ‘liked by many people’ rather than a ‘niche’ or ‘cult’ interest.” (Seaton 2015: 5).

oriented, composing the mainframe of what Choo has called “the imagined space of Japan Brand” (Choo 2012: 97). Sugiura, whom I have referred at the beginning of this section, has demonstrated how karate is an outstanding icon of popular global culture, surpassing equally the *Gameboy* or the *Lord of the Rings* movies.

Since the Cool Japan Campaign is unequivocally conceived as a Nation Branding strategy, karate has to be properly framed in a narrative that fits the needs of the nation, especially when its Olympic debut at Tokyo 2021 is at the horizon. To survey such discourses, take for example the last number of the web magazine *niponica. Discovering Japan* (no.27 - 2019) edited by The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA) and dedicated to sports. A text under the title “The Olympics are Coming to Tokyo”, provides a patent confirmation karate accommodation to national hegemonic narratives. The magazine cover is filled with a half-plane photo of ‘karate athlete’ Shimizu Kiyou (1993), Female Kata winner at the Karate World Championships in 2014 and 2016. Inside, the featuring article “Gaining Recognition in Global Sports - Japanese Martial Arts” shows a spectacular splash page picture depicting Shimizu again along with Kiyuna Ryo. At the body text, karate, a “martial art refined into beautiful kata forms”, is the remarkable protagonist. The article presents the Okinawan origins and even the Chinese influences of karate, but quickly moves to a storyline that reinforces the notions of modernization and internationalization with Japan at the center:

Karate evolved as a martial art practiced with bare hands. Originating in an indigenous Okinawan martial art called te (“hand,” pronounced “tii” in Okinawan), karate was born through a fusion with various Chinese techniques. Over time, it gradually developed and became more sophisticated in its birthplace, Okinawa. Around the 1920s, karate spread throughout Japan. Japanese emigrants are credited with bringing it to the global stage. Today, karate has become the common language of an international community with more than 2 million practitioners in Japan and 130 million practitioners around the world. (*Nipponica* 2019: 4).

The rest of the text renounces to give any hint on the socio-cultural history of karate and put the focus on providing concise athletic explanations. A beginner’s guide to “how to get the most out of watching karate” dedicates a section to “enjoy diversity in styles”, falling again to mention the Okinawan karate styles. In addition to that, the armed aspects of karate, meaning *kobudō*, that compose an integral part of the local understanding and inheritance, are totally neglected. It can be argued that, envisioning

the Olympics, this is done to fit the Japanese delimitation of *karate-dō* as the “way of the empty hand”, re-implementing the national interpretation born in the 30s.

From this perspective, the question of karate as a hermeneutic device for the global spread of Japanese national ideology, the old-new *nihonjinron*, arises once again. Joseph Nye acknowledged Japan as a nation that “has more potential soft power resources than any other Asian country”, comprising “the cultural attractiveness of its traditional spiritual disciplines such as Zen Buddhism and the martial arts” (Nye 2004: 84-85). Through the Cool Japan strategy, we are assisting to a renationalized branding of Japan’s cultural assets. In this plan, karate occupies a nuclear role. It is important to underline that karate, as a part of the Cool Japan Strategy, is institutionally and politically situated under the Cabinet’s designated and law protected Japanese cultural properties. Henceforth hardly karate official rhetoric will disclose explicit contra-proper messages.

Hereof karate symbolic global re-production, envisioning the Olympic is instilled by the terms of the central government. Likewise, mainland karate styles are ultimately Japanese brands of karate with their own imaginaries, iconic references and legacies. Therefore, karate as a national symbol can serve for example to foster Abe’s neo-patriotism and obfuscate the problems of militarism and bases in Okinawa, drawing upon the mere idea of martial arts and sports as a transnational culture of peace, a message, moreover, at the core of the Olympic games conceptual ordination. In this scheme the recognition of Japan’s multiculturalism, the *tabunka kyōsei shakai* discourse, through karate by a “cosmetic” approach reinstates an inner/outer national frontier. By these means conservative, that is supposed multicultural politics, visions anchored in the core of *nihonjinron* find new ways to avoid social transformations (Guarné, Yamashita 2015).

However, as I have pointed out so far, the transnational history and necessary polysemy of karate can also be an agency mechanism for the exercise of Okinawan *soft power* into and from the domestic discourse. As Otmazgin remembers regarding the Cool Japan strategies:

Cultural policy is not simply a top-down process, but a set of initiatives and actions shaped by the performance of the private sector and the way the public views the production and export of culture. To understand cultural policy in Japan, especially when an international aspect is involved, it is therefore beneficial to look not only at actions taken by the government but also at the way popular culture production and export is being discussed and debated in official, intellectual, and popular circles. (Otmazgin 2016: 143).

Hence national policymakers in Japan and cultural elites, although may be reluctant, are also subject to the influences of public debate and flows. The inclusion of formerly stigmatized expressions of Japanese culture, like manga and anime (I might say karate), along the government-sponsored cultural properties and exports is a testimony.

Acknowledging the otherwise not new delicate situation of Okinawan karate, and the hegemonic cultural forces pushing its developments must not drive us to deterministic preconceptions. “Japanization” is not a stony homogenous cultural reality, but rather an elastic adapting process articulating Japanese transnational cultural powers like karate. This process expresses then changes in the orientations of the national cultural policies as a result of Japan’s international relations (Iwabuchi, 2002).

On the other hand, Cool Japan representations and symbolisms “are fragmented and pluralistic” conditioned by the interactions of local and global axis with their own actors (media, producers, consumers, cultural elites, fan communities...) and competing interests. These interactions can surpass the designed outcomes, deifying master narratives and “the state as a regulatory, cultural planning apparatus” (Daliot-Bul 2009: 249).

Thus, the upcoming karate re-branding depends on a newly contoured ‘re-Japanization’ of its contents aiming at the global. This reconfigured actualization of karate image is only possible dialectically, from inside and outside national frontiers, and attending to cultural flows and practices that value both novelty and traditional geographical particularities. Following the imperatives and needs of late cultural capitalism, creating a modern martial brand from karate requires the action of a co-branding strategy. A co-branding cultivated both by Okinawan particularism and Japanese essentialism. Considered as a modern cultural and economic asset, karate would gain symbolic and monetary consumer value as long as is built upon the interplay of three symbolic referents and institutional actors: the appeal of the Japanese nation-state, the global phenomenon of martial arts tourism, and the Okinawan culture uniqueness. Only by intermingling identities and realities, by homogenizing towards Japan and particularizing towards Okinawa as symbolic referents could be karate “authentically” cool. As long as we are not facing an irremediable deterministic top-down movement, is up to us, the audiences and scholars of Japanese studies to hear carefully.





## Concluding Remarks

*A través de ese ceremonial, el pasado se  
convirtiera en presente y el presente en  
pasado, dando así testimonio de la indisoluble  
continuidad de las cosas*

*La montaña mágica (1924),  
Thomas Mann.<sup>284</sup>*

This doctoral dissertation has explored which are the karate narratives that are printed in the public space, whether on the local, national or global dimensions. Thanks to such analysis I have ascertained that karate discourses and images harbor several elements of conflict and change. Those elements are tightly interconnected among them to configure karate as a heterogenous and transnational space that expresses the dialectics between Okinawa, Japan and the rest of the world. Usually, the discursive nucleus of karate gravitates towards events occurred in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a historic momentum in which karate was inserted officially into the *budō* arts, and Okinawa assimilated by Japan. Soon after the archipelago was pushed to be, unwillingly, one of the main centers of the Pacific War horrors, condensing the U.S. occupation of Japan. Okinawan karate gained international dissemination and fame precisely in the time following WWII, when the Prefecture had ceased to pertain to Japan's territory and was ruled by the U.S. Hence the many sufferings, and discriminations that the outbreak of war brought to the inhabitants of the island are a piece of the prism by which karate is seen. In this sense, karate is a *lieu de mémoire* for the community, which inevitably makes the Okinawan martial art and its cultural history, a sensitive yet powerful subject to elucidate the historical relations between Japan and Okinawa, incorporating, in later periods, the U.S to the equation.

Henceforth, as has demonstrated this research, karate is filled with a myriad of political and cultural readings, often antagonist, frequently paradoxical, to configure a multilayered reality. Such interest in driving karate symbolism into particular sociopolitical directions is clear evidence of its iconic valor, and vice versa. Karate might

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<sup>284</sup> "Ceremoniously to make the past present, and the present past, and to proclaim the permanent continuity of all things" *The Magic Mountain* (1924), Thomas Mann.

seem, at first sight, a martial practice, a sport, a passion or a pastime thoroughly depicted in entertainment media, with little heuristic value for Japanese or Okinawan studies. On this issue it is worth to retrieve an observation by Josef Kreiner, a distinguished ethnologist in the disciplines just mentioned, who in its article “Brief Remarks on Paradigm Shifts in Japanese Anthropology during the 20th Century” states: “Okinawan research is constantly used as a heuristic means to gain insight into Japanese culture or its origin and development.” (Kreiner 2017: 55). By this same token, being the most disseminated manifestation of Okinawan culture, karate, although largely ignored in the academia, is a hermeneutical device to acquire knowledge about Okinawa, Japan and their sociocultural relationships. Therefore, this dissertation has investigated karate from a wide diachronic perspective with the aim of illustrating processes of historical development, cultural change, societal reset, affecting the national imaginary of Japan in the domestic and foreign levels.

In doing so, I have expanded and strengthened this thesis hypothesis which stated that, in spite of being commonly considered as stable tradition, Okinawan karate represents an intercultural expression nurtured by the adaptation and resignification of multiple practices and imaginaries. This set of elements are configured by the relationship between Okinawa and Japan, arising particularly from modernity, and accelerating in the current scenario of globalization. Precisely this plasticity integrates karate into wide-ranging sociohistorical and cultural mechanisms, which study allows a better understanding of the East Asian interculturality phenomenon.

Thus, the hypothesis has been addressed through the development of the double objective established. On those premises, then this dissertation has first reevaluated the historical position of karate as a Japanese national symbol, underlining the significance of intra- and extra-regional relations to properly interpret East Asian cultures. Secondly and in consequence, the karate circumstances exposed by this research have illustrated how the global circulation of Japanese cultural images is subject to processes of political and economic reshaping, encouraged by the dialectics between subcultures and the nuclei of the legitimated ones, according to domestic needs and transnational demands.

In this sense, each chapter has formulated and elaborated several findings, underscoring consequences of my hypothesis and implications for the thesis objectives. Similarly, chapters have established a dialogue among them via the particular topics and

general themes of this work. The thoughts introduced at the beginning of this final remarks expanded the motives for this dissertation decision, planned in early stages, to commence with a move from 20<sup>th</sup> century karate discursive nucleus into the distant past. Hence, the initial chapter consisted of an exploration of the Ryūkyū Kingdom establishment to unfold the importance of warfare and military in Okinawa's former eras. To delve into the Ryūkyū Kingdom times with rigor and documented sources has been a methodological prerequisite for avoiding biased re-accountings of karate common places, mainly the romantization of Okinawa as the land without weapons. As we have seen this rendering continue today to support political and cultural interpretations, of which karate participates, with double hedged consequences. On the one hand, those narratives of Okinawa can contribute to building up cultural pride, on the other, nourish the touristification and military occupation of the islands, because the Ryūkyūs offer a unique place that deserves consumption and protection.

The demystifying directive has put at the center of the first chapter issues like the role of piracy, local military lords (*aji*), legal and illegal sea commerce, as well as the motives for China to favor the Ryūkyūs as a trading center, and for Japan to overtake the kingdom, which responded mainly to the same reasons, imperialist movements correlated to economic growth and frontiers security. In this direction, at the first chapter conclusions, I have aimed to highlight echoes of this medieval past that shed light on the difficulties of the current economic and geopolitical situation of Okinawa, a small land with scant natural resources located geographically in an East Asian hotspot for territorial disputes, dependent on international commerce and investments by bigger political actors.

Without undertaking the task of separate facts from myths grounded in this peaceful reinvented image of the Ryūkyū Kingdom past, this research would have produced erroneous and partial interpretations of following events regarding Okinawan and karate history. In the same vein, to revise in in-depth the chronology of Ryūkyūan contacts with Japan and China, their importance, scope and significance, has enabled me to weight up properly cultural affinities in terms of historical periods, areas of influence, permanence and consequences for Okinawan society and culture, balancing intercultural influences on karate. I would like to emphasize this effort transcendence of, because several findings resulting from it allow us to question the claimed prevalence of Chinese martial arts over the Japanese ones in the history of karate. I have shown that the perceived

Chineseness of Okinawan culture is a late development initiated around the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century precisely by policies of Tokugawa Japan. Such discovery translates directly into the current ambiguous status of karate as a legitimate/non-legitimate Japanese martial tradition, mirroring Okinawa as an inner exotic other. In some sense, the dual subordination of the Ryūkyū Kingdom as a vassal state both of Japan and China has been inherited by karate. The tripartite nature of the Okinawan martial arts relegates karate to the diffuse perimeters of national *budō*, and proper *nihonjinron* as the *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan* entry for the Okinawan martial art reminds us.<sup>285</sup> We are here dealing with a question of the utmost importance because it allows us to revisit discursive articulations between center and periphery, Japan and Okinawa, inclusion and exclusion, essence and accident, key concepts of this doctoral thesis.

By taking into the debate, all the aforementioned circumstances of the Ryūkyūs past the first chapter has specifically aimed two of the most disseminated karate historical myths contrasting discursive dialectics between tradition and modernity, one of this thesis objectives. From the point of view of Okinawan peaceful existence, resistance, and karate development, there is no doubt that the Satsuma invasion of 1609 functions as a compelling narrative device.

The inexistence of warfare and military in the Ryūkyūs is still largely assumed or overlooked even by academia. I have shown, nonetheless, that the Ryūkyū Kingdom was a centralized state which extorted military control over its conquered domains along the archipelago. Therefore, the Satsuma overtake was an armed conflict, highly uneven, yet a war, with the Kyūshū clan. The characteristics of the invasion, that was really fast, and its porpoise, mainly the control of commercial and diplomatic networks of the Ryūkyū Kingdom have also been addressed.

Therefore, the aftermath of 1609 was not a thorough occupation of the Okinawan territory but a capture to rule the foreign affairs of the Kingdom, which lasted as a semiautonomous entity for 270 years more. In addition, contrary to what common sense may infer, 1609 marked the beginning of intense de-Japanization and Sinification policies applied to the Ryūkyūs in the interest of Tokugawa Japan. By these procedures, the

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<sup>285</sup> “Karate was historically most widely practiced in China and Okinawa and thus is not considered one of the traditional Japanese martial arts; it is, however, loosely referred to as such outside of Japan.” (Kodansha 1983: 158).

Japanese control of Ryūkyūan commerce was expected to be concealed, and thus the diplomatic and trading ties with China secured. Furthermore, the flows of peoples between Japan and the Ryūkyūs, in former times huge, were severely restricted.

The political construction of the Ryūkyūans as an ethnic other began then and was conspicuously displayed in Edo parades, along with Koreans and Europeans. Even with all these measures, there are several documented testimonies of samurai residing or travelling to the Ryūkyūs between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, and of karate masters learning *jigen-ryu*, a type of swordsmanship pertaining to the Kyūshū clan.

Strongly linked with the notion of Okinawa and karate as Chinese-like others in this first chapter, I have scrutinized another of the foundational myths of the Okinawan martial art: the settling of the 36 families from Fujian in 1392. Supposedly this group of experts in trade and diplomacy, a grant to the kingdom by the Chinese emperor, brought the Chinese martial arts to Okinawa. Although it is probable that some among them or their personal networks had martial knowledge, because the seas were at that time highly dangerous spaces, and virtually any voyage required security measures to confront piracy, there is no direct proof of their fighting skills. In short, nothing allows us to ascertain that specifically, those families introduced Chinese martial arts to the kingdom.

In this regards, it is extremely important to point out several questions. Up to the moment, as this thesis has shown, there is far more archeological and historical support evidencing the movement of big groups of peoples carrying weapons to settle in Okinawa from the north, that is from Japanese territories, between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries than from China. Even so, the Chineseness of ancient Ryūkyūan martial arts is assumed. On the other hand, it must be noted that the 36 families were not the first Fujianese travelling to or residing in the Ryūkyūs. They were, as others had done before, sea entrepreneurs looking for commercial opportunities who acted as middlemen in tributary and private trading.

The 36 families are not a myth exclusive to karate spheres, but it permeates the reconstruction of all Ryūkyūan history. Their depiction as a cluster of literati and crafts experts gifted by the Emperor reifies the notion of the Ryūkyūs as a peaceful land that, in a time of extreme violence, gained the unmatched favor of China by some inherent qualities. All these are partial truths, and the historical interpretation of the events is quite opposed. Certainly, the Ryūkyūs acquired a unique status inside the Chinese tributary

system; nonetheless, this was not the result of philanthropic conduct. As I have revealed the Imperial system identified the Ryūkyūs as a proper place to redirect the attention of piracy out of the Chinese coasts, and by promoting the establishment of Chinese intermediaries in the Ryūkyūs the Middle Empire was expressly trying to control and reorganize commercial already existing networks. Those networks were problematic because they accommodated local lords (*aji*) factions who fiercely and violently, allied or being themselves *wakō* pirates, sought to monopolize them. Hence both measures responded to the same strategy of pacification. The creation of the Ryūkyū Kingdom is directly connected to influential Chinese merchants maneuvering to favor the future Shuri lords and to reduce widespread armed conflicts, as the remains of over one hundred fortifications or *gusuku* in Okinawa testify.

Today, relying on this mythic reconstruction karate masters (as other Okinawans) claim blood bonds to the 36 families as a high-status identity marker, and subsequently of martial skills superiority. Nonetheless, it must be noted that by the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the village of Kume, where those Chinese families resided had almost vanished. Later Kume, following Satsuma orders seeking to recover trade with China, was repopulated peoples from other Okinawan areas as well as from Japan, who were given Chinese names. In sum, the many sociohistorical results of the first chapter contribute in an incomparable manner to one of these thesis objectives that is to ponder the many cultural influences, practices and imaginaries hosted by karate, rethinking its attributions and representativity as a Japanese/non-Japanese martial art. In the same way, this chapter has aided the objective of revise karate peace discourses meant to be at the service of intercultural encounter by revealing its various synthetic and antithetical narrative practices of attribution.

Chapter two has built its arguments on some of the principal religious motifs observable today in karate graphical universe, in a search for their cultural origins and meanings. Such an enterprise has inescapably led us again to the Ryūkyūs past, providing a considerable amount of findings to be applied to the symbolic dimension of karate. The initial pages have been dedicated to showing the importance of religion and women shamanism for the ancient Ryūkyūan martial culture, a topic that, despite raising the interest of fathers of Okinawan studies like Iha Fuyu, was latter largely abandoned. In direct connection to the legends of the Ryūkyū Kingdom, martial and magic prowess, and

one of the most famous karate badges I have reviewed the figure of Uni-Ufugusuku, a folk martial hero of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, to demonstrate the concurrence of the aforementioned themes, all hiding today in the *Shitō-ryū* karate emblem.

Then I have conducted an inquiry on the *hidari gomon*, the royal flag of the Ryūkyū Kingdom, omnipresent in karate paraphernalia. The *hidari gomon* bears a special significance for this thesis results, because being the banner of Hachiman, Japanese god of war and patron of samurai, it confirms the identity encounters between Okinawa and Japan precisely by means of martial culture. Henceforth beyond the pictorial allusion I have verified by scholarly sources the historical background of Hachiman's symbol adoption by the Ryūkyūan monarchy, no other than a warfare oath to the god in order to conquest territories dominated by Kyūshū samurai. This overlapping between Japanese and Okinawan martial culture lives today in what is the most important symbol among the collection of karate iconographies. Furthermore, the many traits of Hachiman worship present in the Ryūkyū Kingdom, which I have been able to trace thanks mainly to the work of Gregory Smits (2019a) yield the documented signs of the close cultural and ethnic links between Okinawa and Japan due to migration flows taking place in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.

With this in mind and pointing out how the *hidari gomon* remained as the flag of the Ryūkyū Kingdom until its demise in 1879, the legacies testified by the Hachiman symbol induce several reconsiderations. As for karate it blatantly displays a case to counter discuss the denial of karate among Japanese fighting traditions and martial arts. Moreover, it does not from an assimilationist perspective but on the contrary, to avoid the dislocation or underestimation of Okinawan history and culture inside Japan. In other words, the evidence of the Hachiman flag presence in Ryūkyūan cultural practices, including karate, must operate to fracture centralist, narrow viewpoints about Japan. Thus karate, together with Hachiman, two Japanese national symbols in collusion, appears as a trojan horse to regain frontiers for Japanese history. The conclusions of the Japanese god section moved forward to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to identify direct and indirect references of the Hachiman markers by Okinawan karate masters.

At that point, my investigation aimed unmistakably at the core of *nihonjinron* and methodological nationalism. It did by exposing non-canonic yet well-grounded uses of a top tier element of Japanese essentialism at the national margins through karate as a martial

art dialoguing with other regions and cultures. The ideological devices of *nihonjinron* for patriotic indoctrination would be exalted by the Japanese nation-state and disseminated on a large-scale during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with a prime place reserved for martial arts and karate, a set of developments addressed by chapter 3 that dialogue unequivocally with this section.

Continuing with chapter 2, its second part has been dedicated to a couple of Chinese deities of Taoist origins that relate to Okinawan martial culture. Mazu, the patron of seafarers, was selected as the first case study. The Chinese goddess strongly resonates with the notions of woman's magic and martial powers studied in the initial pages of the chapter regarding the Ryūkyūs indigenous culture. Mazu's section demonstrates how the goddess, worshipped in the archipelago not only by the Chinese descendants but by many Okinawans, became the center of ritual and diplomatic ceremonies carried for the occasion of Chinese envoys arriving at the Ryūkyūs, well until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The importance of Mazu in the Chinese pantheon was strengthened by the unique capabilities of the deity to face sea dangers, contributing furthermore to military campaigns and the defense of commercial missions. In short, Mazu sacredly embodied and secured the maritime bond between China and the Ryūkyūs with neat martial faculties.

Historical accounts of the Chinese envoys' voyages covering the Fujian Naha route, especially the Wang Ji 1683 journey, a recurrent reference among karate circles, have served to introduce the beliefs and worldviews of seamen and soldiers that formed a large part of the vessels' crew. Thus, the importance of Mazu and the conducting of religious rituals before, during and after the maritime travels, conspicuously noted by martial performances and the use of ceremonial weapons has been assessed. We must remind that the oral history of karate usually refers to Chinese embassies members, especially after the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as instructors of martial arts in the Ryūkyūs. Finally, to find even a closest connection of Mazu to karate cultural history, I have brought in the biographical anecdote of Sokon *Bushi* Matsumura, a capital figure of 19<sup>th</sup> century karate, which tells the story of the master praying to Kannon, often seen in the Ryūkyūs as an avatar of Mazu, upon facing a fierce storm in a Fujian sea passage.

The last case study of chapter 2 is Marshal Tian, usually know in karate spheres as busaganashi, and widely alluded as “patron saint” of karate. In order to understand accurately the attractiveness of the god for 20<sup>th</sup> century karate, besides appearing at the



famous manual *Bubishi*, I have tracked Tian's origins to Fujian. In this Chinese region, the deity has been historically worshipped by many martial schools, mainly of the crane styles, which largely influenced karate. Nonetheless, this observance is of a secondary order, since Tian is a principal deity of the Fujianese beliefs, a protector of villages and god of theater. Intermingling with his abilities in music and shamanic dances the Marshal is a martial expert, a subduer of demons with superior skills in Taoist sorcery, meaning the use of the eight trigrams and the five elements. Undoubtedly these features explain Tian ascendance for Chinese martial art schools.

In Okinawa, since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Tian has been closely connected to Miyagi Chōjun, founder of Goju-ryu. I argue that the Fujianese god of theater has been progressively transformed by some karate schools into a blank bodhisattva, almost deprived of its Fujianese meanings beyond a vague mention to martial aptitudes. On the basis of my research and conjectures, I think this is in the interest of re-creating a deity to be used specifically by karate, a tradition which lacks its own martial god. I sustain that the recent consecration of a Tian figurine inside a Shintō shrine near the Prefectural Budōkan and the Funakoshi Gichin memorial in Naha is a proof of such attempts. Visits to Tian statue have been included in Okinawan karate tour packages by private companies. After all, many organizations are well aware of the fame and appeal that the busaganashi depictions, widely broadcasted on the internet by karate aficionados, had acquired for practitioners all over the world. By these means chapter two has contributed to the objective of analyzing the diverse nurturing of karate symbolisms, they function to represent identities and alterities, and how this is nowadays connected to domestic needs and transnational demands; a matter further developed in the next chapter.

Once the proper historical and cultural basis for karate had been established in chapters 1 and 2, chapter 3 turned its attention entirely into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, defining three chronological stages: pre-war karate, globalized karate and contemporary karate; as well as three conceptual frames: *nihonjinron*, heritage and tourism. The initial sections focused on the insertion of karate into the corpus of modern *budō*, a process paralleling Okinawa's incorporation by the Japanese state, which was largely driven by the *doka seisaku*, the assimilation policies applied to many colonial territories. The notions that commonly guide the analysis and explanations of the karate transformations, largely derived from

postwar interpretations and prompted by political discourses voluntarily or not aligning with U.S. administration interests, are “forceful conversion” and “Japanization”.

The reality of karate inclusion in Japan, however, as we have seen, is much more complicated. Undoubtedly an explanatory device such as “Japanization” contribute to communicating palpable truths regarding the vast and radical reforms introduced in the archipelago, that brought cultural downplay and discrimination to its inhabitants. On top of that, Okinawans endured huge economic struggles that provoked the largest Japanese migration within the national boundaries and to overseas territories.<sup>286</sup> Yet, the overall picture is far more intricated than a plain opposition Japan-Okinawa, being this also valid for karate. Many regions and individuals in the country were subjected to the ultranationalism and fascism irradiated from geographical centers and institutional powers governing the Japanese territories. As for karate, I argue that standardization and modernization, that is sportification, along intense politization for patriotic purposes, are the key concepts to understand the Okinawan martial arts transformations in this epoch. Indeed, the processes I just mentioned affected all the Japanese martial arts, coopted progressively by right-wing militarism and imperialism.

Thus “Japanization”, as for imposed Japanese acculturation, can be a misleading message to properly grasp some developments. In this sense, chapter 3 first section demonstrated how karate was an active device for adapting Okinawa to a new Japanese state that was emerging after the Meiji Reforms, by means of scholar curricula and military instruction since the very beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Relevant Okinawan karate masters were at the forefront of karate’s so-called “Japanization” according to the Butokukai requirements, with the understanding that the discipline needed to expand, modernize and systematize to be improved and survive. In the end, martial arts are alive traditions very susceptible to the gathering of new knowledges and forms. This initial section of chapter 3 has therefore aligned with the objectives of reexamining the historical

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<sup>286</sup> Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the WWII its estimated than more than 70.000 Okinawans (11% of the population) migrated to North and South America, South East Asia and Micronesia. Among of them some karate practitioners, that had received training in Okinawan public schools and private dojos, continued to train and teach overseas. For Okinawan communities abroad karate acted as an identity marker and maker. As early as the 20’s some karate masters residing in Okinawa began to be invited by second-generation Okinawans to teach and give lectures overseas, as in the famous case of Miyagui Chojun travel to Hawaii in 1934. Thus, migration has been an important transporter for karate dissemination and cultural representativeness.

processes that brought the sportization of karate, and evaluation of the dimension of tradition and modernity in the discourses of karate and its myths.

Likewise, the standardization of karate scripture as the “the empty hand” in the 1936 meeting, although in my opinion an obvious top-down movement politically induced and with clear anti-Chinese aims, can neither be explained in terms of the obligated alteration of an existing agreement; because there was not a consensus about karate name in Okinawa, nor the most relevant masters attending to the famous meeting opposed to such change. Actually, karate was widely seen as a way to claim Okinawan pride inside the dominant ideological frame of Japan, largely driven by martial arts as bearers both of the *nihonjinron* and the modern alterity of the Japanese civilization.

Therefore, it was expected that karate could be retained and used as representative of an admirable Okinawan culture, a hope that, nevertheless was not to be confirmed. Just before the war mainland natives began to occupy the highest positions in the nascent karate organizations in Japan, despite being students of Okinawan masters migrated to Tokyo and Kansai areas. Then WWII and the occupation of Okinawa by the U.S. amplified and intensified the split between Okinawan karate and Japanese karate. If this circumstance allowed the maintenance and dissemination of the Okinawan tradition, or rather re-lesened Okinawan karate value at the eyes of mainland karate organizations requires further research. Probably both concurrences are perfectly compatible and contribute to explaining the persistence of karate multiple ambivalent statuses addressed by later sections. To sum up, in prewar times, as happened repeatedly in Ryūkyūan history, major geopolitical events were underway, and hence the course of local action heavily restricted. Adaptation and negotiation of the own culture were once again the powers of the weak.

Moving to the aftermath of WWII, chapter 3 continued with an essay about the Japaneseness of karate in the first wave of martial arts globalization, in which the Okinawan martial art was a central protagonist via actual practice and media consumptions. The main topics here revised are the construction and circulation of *nihonjinron* ideologies, and intimately mingled with them the restoration of Japanese martial arts and *bushidō* images. We have seen how, without renouncing to traits of these underpinnings, karate was re-appropriated by both the U.S. mainstream and counterculture by the impact of cultural industries productions. On the one hand, karate

was growing as an icon of cultural resistance and peace metaphor (remember that Okinawa was under U.S. administration until 1972 and then reverted to Japan), on the other karate displayed worldwide the superior organization and productivity of the Japanese society and its ethos, which supposedly explained the post-war economic miracle. This stage expanded the multivalences of karate, and its examination contributed to ground the objective of evidencing how the global circulation and consumption of Japanese cultural images are subjected to political and economic reconfigurations nourished by the dialectic between subcultures and the nuclei of legitimate cultures, according to the interplay of domestic and foreign spheres.

Correspondingly it has substantiated the objectives of analyzing karate as a symbolic mechanism of (re)presentation of identities and alterities both inside and outside Japan, and of reconstructing its presence in the collective popular imagination and lexicon. Henceforth the Okinawan martial art could house the traditionalist turns of a Japanese literary star, Mishima Yukio; reify a *zainichi* Korean, Ōyama Masutatsu, as the national and international hero of Japanese karate; it could metamorphosize an Okinawan master, Miyagi Chojun, into an icon of global popular culture appearing in *The Karate Kid* movies, Mr. Miyagi; nurture the creation of “American karate” or inspire black contracultural movements; be claimed by Bruce Lee as of Chinese origins to reinstate the authority of Chinese martial arts over the Japanese ones; give birth to large numbers of videogames inside and outside Japan; or signify the hard-work spirit of Japanese corporations and their salary man.

And even so, or precisely by this reason, post-war karate was still trapped by the cultural dialectic of inclusion and exclusion, and hence remained at the margins of proper *budō*. In addition, karate was often matched in Japan with violent, vulgar and unrefined practices, as well as social groups like young gangs and yakuza. Many cultural images, persisting nowadays, were formed at then, Due to its multicultural and social class associations karate met many challenges in obtaining credit in the land of *bushidō*. The cultural richness and social diversity are ultimately against *nihonjinron* ideologies. As Steven Chan reminds:

This peasant martial art reveals most radically the lengths it is possible to go to acquire respectability in Japan. The courtesies are imported into it, as are declared concerns for Zen and Shinto. It is rigorously codified, in each of over 200 competing mainland Japanese ryu, and it has, like Judo before it, reached out to

a mass audience where it is becoming governed by sports techniques. The courtesies are what remain of the attempt to make this martial art seem Japanese. It is an art that has grown by integration and is the least pure of all the martial arts in Japan today. (Chan 2000: 72)

The paradox arises when we are faced with the reality that karate has become the most famous Japanese martial art, an outstanding national asset to reach the international public. Indeed, karate is a prime vehicle to assist in the exercise of *soft power* and cultural diplomacy in global geopolitics. As a consequence, karate cannot be officially disregarded neither minored by the Japanese state; on the contrary, it has to be reinvigorated to contribute to Japan's economic and cultural revitalization for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. So, inexorably, both the ongoing renovations of karate and Japan to adjust the work frame of cultural capitalism and international politics require the acknowledgement of the art Okinawan origins and particularities.

From this standpoint, Chapter 3 continued with an exploration of the heritagization process of karate, initiated in the late 90s by the designation of the Okinawan martial art as intangible cultural property at the prefectural level. The construction of karate in the way of institutionalized heritage has been following the path, and substantiated by association, of the Ryūkyūan cultural renaissance and the several natural and cultural assets recognized by Japan and the UNESCO as patrimony like the Shuri Castle. Nevertheless, an exploration and justification of cultural heritage always entangle comprehensive research on cultural history. Some elements may be concealed in benefit of idealized visions of national and regional cultures, as the Ryūkyū Kingdom violent past, whereas others will equally unveil and resurrect old controversies between Okinawa and Japan.

Karate, building up its UNESCO candidature, is currently at this juncture. On the one hand, it must be demonstrated as a specific representative of Okinawan cultural practices (and not as a worldwide phenomenon) which furthermore bears significant meaning for the majority of the prefecture inhabitants. On the other hand, karate requires the institutional patronage of the Japanese state, who will also benefit from the UNESCO recognition. The most conspicuous evidence of the sum of these needs is the construction of the Okinawa Karate Kaikan in 2017, a facility that houses a museum consecrated exclusively to Okinawan karate. The building, however, has been unmistakably projected

as a tourist attraction with several references to the charms of Okinawa as a travel and leisure destination.

The last section of this ending chapter has been dedicated, thus, to delineate the construction of a karate tourism niche, a strategy that requires recentering the cartographies of karate. First, I have provided an extensive examination about the planning of Okinawa as ‘Japan tourism prefecture’. Then I have analyzed the private and public market of karate tourism and the branding of karate, by martial, sports, heritage and contents tourism, all in relation to the tourist gaze functioning in Okinawa. I have provided multiple examples of karate tours and packages and how they commodify karate, usually in association with other Okinawan touristic assets, being sun and beaches or UNESCO World Heritages.

Finally, I have considered the limits of the local agency, as well as the dangers and opportunities for karate in operating on transnational markets affecting cultural and economic assets that are, at one time, local and global. Such circumstances evolve around the openings they provide to convey unknown and positive local messages about Okinawan karate, and by an association of Okinawan traditions, reaching the international public on one side. But also, on the other, raise concerns regarding the many menaces of banalization and monetization of local cultures for economic purposes. To conclude this last chapter, I have introduced some remarks on the renewed value and relevance of karate for Japan’s national strategies as demonstrated by its official inclusion in the Cool Japan campaign. With this basis, chapter 3 has served to develop the objective of exploring the symbolic dimension of karate as an object of mass consumption, related to Okinawan and Japanese identity, the Nation Branding and Cool Japan strategies and the cultural industries.

Thanks to the chapters unfolding and outcomes this research has accomplished the objective of contributing the development of Okinawan studies and East Asian studies, assessing the explanatory potential of karate to elucidate a plurality of socio-political and cultural transformations such as a detailed insight of the essential dichotomy tradition/modernity, the articulation of Okinawa in the creation of the Japanese state and identity, the making of national mythologies, or the universal circulation and assimilation of customs and representational images of the East Asian culture.

At this point, I would like to momentarily go back to the introductory lines to these conclusions. One of the methodological objectives of this thesis was to expand its analytical framework beyond the discursive nucleus of karate pinned to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a widening towards distant and recent, virtually unexplored, but extremely fruitful territories and epochs. It has done so to overcome, without ceasing to pay attention to, the sportization-tradition axis; which on the other hand continues to dominate the structure of karate research as a self-referential discipline, weakly connected to Okinawan studies.

The other main purpose has been to historically objectivize karate prewar period itself. I argue that its magnetic centrality has two clear political effects on our contemporaneity. First it contributes to fix a vision anchored in limited notions that oppose Okinawa and Japan as monoliths, clouding constitutive nuances like those explored in this dissertation. This univocal prospect may actually benefit the intentions of radically opposed spectrum extremes, removing the necessary in-betweens.

Second, the pre-war karate kernel serves to currently present karate as an a-conflictive sphere, displacing largely the controversy into the past. In other words, from an internal point of view, and here I am referring to the intra-field of karate's cultural history, to conceive the Okinawan martial art as a rigid expression that has reached the end of its effective historical evolution. Though it perhaps seems contradictory, the operation of reducing karate to binary identity poles supposedly rooted in the past petrifies its cultural history also for the future. By this means, everything is oriented to interpret and reach a consensus upon a half-century narrowed history, nevertheless not a minor difficulty. Even so, the dichotomy functions to articulate the karate tradition-modernity locus, in Okinawa and Japan respectively, and the heritage-sport one in the same correspondence. As it can be seen, such division in some sense reinstates the subordinated place of Okinawan culture, far from the aesthetic syncretism of tradition and modernity performed by 21<sup>st</sup> century Japan. It is an evolutionary standpoint that resounds with old discriminations.

Moreover, because of the embedded situation of Okinawa as a Japanese region, karate dichotomy, usually presented as “Okinawan karate” versus “Japanese karate”, allows the power centers of the state to exhibit a new sensibility towards the country minorities, displaying Japan as a multicultural nation far from imperialist desires of

former eras. The national cultural hierarchies, nevertheless, by this same construct, that is conceding the existence of the peripheral-exotic at the margins, intend to rest intact. It must be noted how presenting the complexes of the historical-cultural dialectics between Japan and Okinawa and how they shaped karate history, in simplified opposing terms will lead to reinforcing an equally false Okinawan essentialism, and thus, perhaps unintentionally, the Japanese one that may read Okinawan culture as a subordinate subsystem.

In the end, the debate on karate gathers around the attachment of cultural identity underpinnings by dominant stakeholders inside and outside Okinawa, whereby they can conceal their social and economic preferences and interests. Interest, on the other side, that can perfectly align for macro-objectives like the UNESCO recognition and the professionalization of karate tourism industries. The paradox of a karate reified culture, even acknowledging its inner contradictions, is that it such reification acts in many layers as depoliticizing tool to construct an economic and political oligopoly.

In sum, the dual process of obfuscating karate distant past and nearest present is the negative of the pre-war period magnification. The stressing of this 20<sup>th</sup> century historical keystone nonetheless brings necessarily questions about the ties between karate, Okinawa and Japan. Questions that illuminate current developments like the UNESCO candidature, a plan that is facing considerable difficulties to accommodate multiple and contradictory interests, and hence deploy a coherent narrative. Therefore, this thesis has established a conversation between contemporary karate politics and the Ryūkyūan past for the purpose of revealing a still very lively cultural history. In fact, at this moment, fully engaged in the symbolic and discursive rearrangement.

The research here conducted and the above summarizing of chapters, findings and conclusions, confirm this dissertation hypothesis. Effectively I have demonstrated, by several concurrences and examples analyzed from historical, anthropological and sociological perspectives, that karate is an icon that has made intense use of resignification to reshape its cultural practices and imaginaries. Globalization accelerated the circulation of images linked to karate, rooting an intercultural bridge between Okinawa, Japan and the rest of the world. Multiple social, political and economic contexts configured accordingly a changing phenomenon, that reflected transformations in the domestic and international dimensions. The first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have brought



further developments bonding karate to the restoration of the Ryūkyūs past and the commodification of Okinawan culture by tourism industries.

In a broad sense, yet, karate maintains its historical function within the global image of the Japanese Nationalism. Karate's participation in Tokyo 2021 implies, in principle, a new impulse in a national-sportization process that started during the Meiji era driven by the Japanese authorities and influential Okinawan figures. Yet, such a mega-event and its commercial and structural implications provide a condition of opportunity for constructing local narratives, revealing at the same time hegemonies, convergences and divergences of interests inside the Okinawan prefecture and with the mainland.

Actually, besides the state and regional actors, karate is largely guided by transnational organizations, like the World Karate Federation, and multinational companies of goods and services, for which karate is basically a lucrative industry. Nonetheless, because cultural capitalism makes from particularism a main value of an economic asset, and from multiculturalism an attractive factor, the globalized articulations of karate cannot escape to its local functions. Revitalized, karate collaborates in transmitting a positive (self) image of Okinawa understood as a heterogeneous territory. Concurrently, the reification of karate, by means of an indigenous tradition associated with folk rituals and native sites of the Okinawan heritage, forges a political Ryūkyūan item, bringing in a distinct sense of identity, memory and legacy.

Therefore, because globalization also means politization and reappropriation and not always McDonaldization (Beck 1998; Ritzer 1992) karate is a contested reality, a disputed symbol. The cultural history of karate questions the presumed homogeneity of the Japanese nation. Developed in a quasi-colonial and permeable frontier of the nation, karate, like other Okinawan cultural practices, has been shaped, and to some extent even trapped, by a double dynamic of assimilation and alienation.

This historical ambivalence in the social fabric of the Japanese/Okinawan identity is at present being lifted and maneuvered in karate at the intersections between heritage politics, sports, tourism and the logics of cultural capitalism and nation-building. We are observing, paraphrasing the old Marxist concept, a struggle for the means of production, now in the setting of globalization. These globalized means of production, that is to say karate, include categories of symbolic domination, producers of meanings, contents as identity signifiers.

In the same manner that Japan(eseness) and Okinawa(eseness) need each other to successfully carry on the economic project – the tangible uses- of karate as a cultural and sports industry, it does the global and local symbolism – the intangible images- of karate as a Japanese/Okinawan heritage. One objective cannot be achieved without the other, even with its inner contradictions. In this process, the cultural, political and economic aspects of karate's history are a decisive matter. The delicate equilibrium game between the local narratives and the state discourses upon this martial art discloses the intercultural dimension of karate in the East Asian milieu, and sheds light about the place of Okinawa in writing the history of the Japanese nation.

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