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40 Years of Zendo Karate Tao-Te-Tao and Idokan Karate (1975–2015)

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Key words: martial arts, budo, karate, history, values

Abstract

Background. The Humanistic Theory of Martial Arts and the history of physical culture together constitute the theoretical framework for this research.

Aims and Objectives. The objective is an explanation of the educational and other values of the Zendo karate style (in terms of its technical structure, curriculum and humanistic content) and their role in its evolution.

Methods. A qualitative study of sources (by Peter K. Jahnke) and literature, and a longitudinal participant observation study were used. This has been ongoing in the Honbu (in Munich) and in some other martial arts’ organisations since 1993.

Results. The authors present a chronicle of the people practising today, the technical structure and programme, and the special humanistic values of this School and style. The unique values of Zendo karate Tai-te-tao include: 1) not succumbing to extreme commercialization; 2) rejection of competitive sports; 3) attention to teaching real self-defence techniques within the schools; 4) the requirement for theoretical knowledge and ethics; 5) simplified curriculum divided into 5 degrees of ‘kyu’, and 3 ‘dan’ degrees (only 2 student forms and 2 master forms).

Conclusions. In Zendo karate Tai-te-tao both educational and utilitarian values, in terms of its technical structure, curriculum and humanistic content, can be found. It is a School, style and direction in karate, established 40 years ago in Europe, but which has also gained recognition in Japan. At that time modifications in the technical sphere were made and the curriculum started to evolve.

Introduction

Zendo karate Tai-te-tao was born as a result of a confrontation between the Japanese and Korean styles and American kenpo-karate and related styles of “flexible” karate. It is also the result of the experience and knowledge of Peter K. Jahnke, and a group of German martial arts instructors. It was in Munich, in the early 1970s.

What is the aim of this study and the methodology used? The objective is an explanation of the educational and other values of the Zendo karate style (Zendo karate Tai-te-tao / Idokan karate). In terms of its technical structure, curriculum and humanistic content, the theoretical perspective is provided by the Humanistic Theory of Martial Arts [Cynarski 2004].

The methods used include a qualitative study of sources (Jahnke, and others) and literature; and a longitudinal participant observational study in the Honbu (in Munich) and in some other martial arts’ organisations, over the last 20 years.

Previous publications on Zendo karate, have mainly concentrated on the characteristics and style of the School, and its teaching methods and techniques [cf. Bachmeier, Uebrueck 1999; Cynarski 1997a, 1999, 2000, 2004; Cynarski, Buchhold 2006; Cynarski, Sieber, Litwiniuk 2006, 2007; Cynarski, Sieber 2007; Cynarski, Obodynski, Litwiniuk 2008; Sieber, Cynarski 2002, 2003, 2004; etc.]. Only some of them have concerned the history of this style.

Later publications provided more detail on the history of this style and the people associated with it; their methods of teaching, the tactical rules and technical elements [Schmidt 2004; Cynarski, Obodynski, Litwiniuk 2008; Sieber, Cynarski 2002, 2003, 2004; etc.]. However the events of the last few years have not been fully described.
Results

1. Chronicle

In 1975 a German master of martial arts Peter Knud Jahnke (1936-13.08.1995) founded the Zendo karate Tai-te-tao style [Jahnke 1992]. This was as a response to the brutalization of sport karate and taekwondo [Schmidt 2004: 13]. In 1976 the “Dan-Federation of Zen-Do-Karate Tai-Te-Tao and Budo” (DFK) was registered [Statutes DFK 1976]. Some Japanese scientists and experts (Prof. Dr Toshie Iritani, Prof. Dr Takeshi Yoneyama, Shihan Kenzo Umeda) highly valued this style, and its technical and humanistic values [cf. Cynarski 2000: 100-101; Schmidt 2004: 15-16].

Students of sensei Jahnke in karate included: Werner Froetsch 3 dan (Germany), Albert V. Burch 2 dan (USA), and Robert Robinson 1 dan (Spain). Jahnke also taught karate in Turkey (in 1970 and 1972), but this did not lead to the creation of dojo representing this direction in karate.

The best student was Lothar Sieber and he ran the Honbu on behalf of Grand Master Jahnke, while he was still alive, and acted as dai-shihan. He inherited the style, created by Jahnke, as his legacy as and became its legitimate soke [Cynarski 2009]. Sieber added elements of the flexible, American US TAI karate system to his School. He also became the leader of the DFK organization.

GM Jahnke's other explorations, particularly religious ones [Jahnke 1983], did not find many followers. His analysis of sword-use was partially continued in the system of Te-katana-do developed by Prof. Sven R. Hooge (now soke, 10 dan Te-katana-do). The use of traditional kobudo weapons has, however, been carried out since 1997 in the Idokan Yoshin-ryu budo system under the auspices of the Idokan Poland Association (IPA) [Cynarski 1997a].

In the 1990s Lothar and Hannelore Sieber were teaching and promoting the style intensively in Germany and Spain [cf. Sieber L. 1992, 1993a, b, c, 2001; Sieber H. 1997]. Wojciech J. Cynarski, an instructor from Poland and at the time already an advanced karateka and jujutsuka, became shihan Sieber's uchi-deshi (live-in apprentice) in January 1993.

In 1995 Jahnke died, and Lothar Sieber became his official successor (soke) [Cynarski 1997b; Lind 1999: 564, 698].

Lothar Sieber trained more experts from Germany, Spain, Greece and Poland. His Polish uchi-deshi Cynarski established the Idokan Poland Association (IPA), in March 1993 which originally functioned as a representative of IEI [Urbanik 1994]. The IPA has subsequently operated independently while still promoting karate according to the rules of GM Sieber's School.


Dietmar Schmidt was a holder of 5 dan in Zendo karate Tai-te-tao, before he set up his own School, the Zendo-ryu karate-do [Schmidt 2002]. It largely consisted of the practice of Zen Buddhism [Schmidt 2004: 13-29] and Wally Strauss's concept of ido. At the time Schmidt

Photo 1. GM Sieber practising on a dummy. Honbu, Munich [author's collection]

was a holder of 7 dan ido [Schmidt 2004: 17]. Similarities between the concepts of ‘Ido’ and ‘Aiki’ meant that Schmidt introduced the Aiki Shisei (kata) form at his School [Schmidt 2004: 123-136]. Schmidt and Bachmeier split from the Honbu’s hereditary transmission system, of correct teaching by the soke. The main teaching styles are ratified by the following organisations: the Deutscher Dan-Traeger und Budo-Lehrer Verband e.V. (DDBV), the Deutscher Jiujitsu Ring “Erich Rahn” e.V. (DJJR), the DFK, and the IPA [Cynarski 2014b].

In 2011 the DJJR awarded Mrs. Hannelore Sieber 7th dan degree in Zendo karate Tai-te-tao, in the main line of transmission. Josef Bachmeier had created Sanjuro-ha Zendo karate Tai-te-tao, a School within the style, but soke forbade him from using the name “Zendo karate Tai-te-tao”, because he mixed this fighting art with the American kenpo-karate. Thus Bachmeier called his School “Heiwa kenpo” (peaceful struggle) and its organization awarded him 6th and 7th dan. Co-incidentally, Heiwa kenpo was the term given to “Zendo karate Tai-te-tao” by a Japanese expert, Professor Toshie Iritani [Bachmeier, Uebrueck 1999; Cynarski 2000: 101].

Dietmar Schmidt had also been the holder of 5 dan in Zendo karate Tai-te-tao, before he created his own School in Greece - the Zendo-ryu karate-do [Schmidt 2002]. Rudolf Gabert, 4 dan in Zendo karate Tai-te-tao, works with Schmidt.

In 2012 Cynarski received the 7 dan degree in Zendo karate Tai-te-tao, from the DFK, and three years later (in February 2015) 8 dan, and the title hanshi. The award was made in Neuffen, where Cynarski was running training in the specialised techniques of Zendo karate Tai-te-tao [Sieber, Cynarski, Mysztak 2015; photo 3]. Hannelore Sieber was also awarded 8 dan, and the title of hanshi in Zendo karate Tai-te-tao.

2. Today

There have been large numbers of students and karatekas in GM Sieber’s school including Enrique Aledo Banuls from Spain, who received 5 dan in Zendo karate Tai-te-tao. However, this Spanish karateka now focuses on teaching karate Shotokan and sports karate (he has 8 dan in karatedo, kyoshi). Ulf Martens, another former student and 6 dan, stopped training due to health reasons in 2000. Other practitioners included: Frank Uebrueck 2 dan (and 5 dan jujutsu DJJR), Manfred Marwan 2 dan, and other karatekas. Josef Bachmeier (5 dan from L. Sieber) is a leader of Heiwa kenpo today.

What is the teaching and transference style of the Honbu dojo and of dai-soke Sieber these days? And who teaches it? They include:

GM Lothar Sieber: 10 dan Zendo karate Tai-te-tao; 10 dan Yoshin-ryu jujutsu; 10 dan Idokan judo-do/ido: dai-soke of the school, and karate meijin;
Hannelore Sieber: 8 dan Zendo karate Tai-te-tao, hanshi: 9 dan jujutsu (Munich & Weichs, Germany);
Wojciech J. Cynarski: 8 dan Zendo karate Tai-te-tao, hanshi: 9 dan jujutsu, hanshi: 10 dan judo-do/ido (Rzeszow & Strzyzow, Poland);

Photo 3. Soke Sieber hands shihan Cynarski his 8 dan certificate. Neuffen (Germany), Feb. 2015 [courtesy of H. Sieber]
Bodo Blumentritt: 4 dan Zendo karate Tai-te-tao: 5 dan jujutsu (Munich & Weichs, Germany);
Gerhard Jung: 4 dan Zendo karate Tai-te-tao: 7 dan jujutsu (Augsburg, Germany).

As at 2015 there is a group of outstanding karateka of the Zendo karate Tai-te-tao style who practise directly by soke in the German Honbu. Among the best of the best are: H. Sieber 8 dan; Christian Brandt 4 dan; Bodo Blumentritt 4 dan; Klaus Holzer 1 dan; Siegfried Seldmeier 1 dan; Dr Ulrich Diekoetter 1 dan; Manfred Geiger 4 dan jujutsu-karate and Wolfgang Kroetz 1 dan karate-do.

In Poland the only centre licenced to teach this style is led by shihan Cynarski, 8 dan. He is the 3rd hanshi in the history of Polish karate, after Jan Dydych (8 dan, Oyama karate) and Tomasz Piotrkowicz (8 dan, Gōsoku-ryu). The best karateka of Zendo karate Tai-te-tao in Poland include: Pawel Szlachta 2 dan; Marek Mroszczyk 2 dan (now outside the organization); Tomasz Szlachta 1 kyu; Łukasz Cynarski 2 kyu and Piotr Jaskolski 3 kyu.

2015 is the 40th anniversary of the school / style, and in January 2016 the soke, meijin Lothar Sieber celebrates his 70th birthday. So the process of the institutionalization is advanced here. But these facts do not have very much influence on the global popularity of this School of karate [cf. Tab. 1].

3. Technical structure and programme

The technical structure of Zendo karate consists of a variety of elements: kihon waza, kata [Bachmeier, Uebrueck 1999; Cynarski, Obodyski, Litwinik 2008]; self-defence techniques (from modern jujutsu), and some special techniques (soft blocks, trap blocks, blows supported by wrist movements [photo 2], and manual chain techniques).

Students at levels 5–1 kyu practise the kyu-kata forms of jindo-te and jinte. At the 1-3 dan levels (3rd dan is the highest level of technical attainment) students practise the dan-kata forms of Tai-te-tao (created by GM Jahnke) and Tai-te-jutsu (developed by GM Sieber). In this latter form, required for 3rd dan, the Chinese kenpo movements are observed. This form is demonstrated by shihan Cynarski in the film (Link YouTube).

The ability to connect a combination of techniques, to learn breathing skills and kime, to develop fluidity of movement, a sense of rhythm and last but not least real fighting skills – both in attack and defence – are at the heart of the training. In the early stages of learning, the repetitive method of teaching is preferred, then imitation of the master in the performance of combinations and technical forms, and later the development of one’s own creativity in self-defence and free-fighting. Basic techniques (kihon), forms (kata) and fighting methods (kumite), and self-defence are practised. Makiwaras, wooden dummies, [photo 1] and other special equipment (including focus pads, boxing gloves (“paws”) and frames for checking the accuracy of choku-zuki) are used in teaching. Methods known from other schools of karate, such as ippon kumite (one step sparring) are also used [Cynarski, Obodyski 2005]. Tameshiwarai is used to test the practitioner’s board-breaking skills.

Teaching (as implemented in the Honbu) is the subject of a certain degree of evolution. It is a continuous development of Jahnke’s techniques and ideas. In recent years references to the Okinawa tradition (karate-jutsu, as an art of self-defence) have been noted and close cooperation with the Okinawa karate school in Neuffen has been developed [cf. Mattson 1963; Momola, Cynarski 2003; Ettlin 2013; Cynarski 2014b]. It should be noted that shihan Sieber holds the 8 dan degree in Okinawa karate, so there is a connection to the roots of karate. In addition, in the Honbu, the close connection between Zendo karate Tai-te-tao and jujutsu (jijutsu-karate), can be seen in the emphasis on manual techniques in close-quarter engagement (see below) [photos 1, 2], and self-defence skills. Soke Sieber has perfected the style, while making modifications to it. This can also be seen in shihan Cynarski’s curriculum which was being taught at the Honbu some 15–20 years ago. So Zendo karate Tai-te-tao is here closer to the models of Japanese karate.

In the typology of martial arts, or fighting arts we find: 1. Performance arts; 2. Internal arts; 3. Weapons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ordinal</th>
<th>name</th>
<th>degree/karatedo</th>
<th>country</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lothar Sieber</td>
<td>10 dan</td>
<td>Germany</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Wojciech J. Cynarski</td>
<td>8 dan</td>
<td>Poland</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hannelore Sieber</td>
<td>8 dan</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Christian Brandt</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Bodo Blumentritt</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Gerhard Jung</td>
<td>4 dan</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Pawel Szlachta</td>
<td>2 dan</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Siegfried Seldmeier</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Klaus Holzer</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ulrich Diekoetter</td>
<td>1 dan</td>
<td>Germany</td>
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[Source: own research]
arts; 4. Self-defence arts; 5. Combat sports (grappling and striking combined) [Bolelli 2008: 115-140]. The style and direction discussed here represent, at the same time, both 'Self-defence arts' (self-defence in the technical programme) and 'Internal arts', where the focus is on the personal development of practitioners.

Zendo karate Tai-te-tao / Idokan karate hold an important position in the Idokan Yoshin-ryu budo system, as the second basic martial art, after jujutsu. This is a comprehensive system [Cynarski, Buchhold 2006], and includes: taido (1st category in Bolelli's typology); ido and aikijutsu (2nd); kobudo and kenjutsu (3rd); jujutsu and goshinjutsu (4th); judo; kick-boxing and sport jujutsu (5th) [cf. Klos 1994; IPA 2012].

In comparison to other karate styles, Zendo karate Tai-te-tao puts more emphasis on close-quarter combat, soft, cat-like movements, a wide repertoire of techniques, and real skills in self-defence [Sieber 2011]. In contrast, it rejects sport karate competitions.

Zendo-ryu karate is an American style created by Philipp M. Skornia (alias Zen Ki), a student of Eizo Shimabukuro [Lind 1996: 988]. This style has little to do with Zendo karate Tai-te-tao. Lind also uses the name "Zendo-ryu karate" for Zendo karate Tai-te-tao [cf. Lind 1996: 988-989], i.e. for Jahnke and Sieber's styles. And yet they are the two different styles.

4. Humanistic values

The values of karate-do are discussed by Mattson [1963], Funakoshi [1994], Oyama [1979], Habersetzer [1994], Schmidt [2002], Skorska [2003], and Mor-Stabilini [2013].

In particular, the idea of Funakoshi's karate-do is an interesting combination of Confucian ethics and the practice of martial arts. The Jahnke method dispelled the idea of karate-do. Jahnke was opposed to competitive sports, and saw the combat as an exercise in mutual learning. In addition, he felt that karate should take advantage of the flexibility used in jujutsu.

Jahnke, 6 dan karatedo, created the karate-and-meditation pathway, bringing their outstanding values together. For example the "non-violence" rule is applied, as is the humanitarian protection of the vulnerable. Mental and spiritual elements [Sieber, Cynarski, Litwiniuk 2007], symbolic dimensions [Sieber, Cynarski, Litwiniuk 2008], educational values and patriotic aspects [Sieber et al. 2009] are also found in this system.

Jahnke's 'spiritual sword' [Schmidt 2004: 140] is – in Zendo karate Tai-te-tao – the only one used against violence. In his understanding, Budo should be helpful in humanising society. This 'spiritual sword' and the 'Great Law of Love' refer directly to the Gospels. So these are values with roots in the axiology of European civilization while still, of course, maintaining great respect for the wisdom of Eastern philosophy.

Discussion

Karate is changing, because the cultural background and motivation of the people practising it is changing [cf. Skorska 2003; Kusnierz 2011; Cynarski 2013; Jakhel, Pieter 2013]. The style and school of Zendo karate Tai-te-tao has also changed within the last 40 years. Dai-soke Sieber is still improving the technical content and the curriculum. The form of Dan-kata Tao-te has been removed from the curriculum. In the Munich Honbu, high side and roundhouse kicks have been rejected as unnatural for a man to perform.

Two major trends dominate the development of karate: the preservation of orthodox teaching and that of continuous modifications. In particular the representatives of the strictly Japanese schools and organizations, opt to keep the spirit of Budo alive through karate [cf. Doval, Uozumi 2010]. In turn, the spirit of modernising schools' traditional techniques was introduced to the global martial arts environment by Bruce Lee [1975]. The Jahnke and Sieber School preserves the spirit of martial arts (Budo and Zendo as a moral way, and as an educational process) while at the same time constantly improving the technical sphere.

The shape of a School, its way of teaching and the direction of change are significantly influenced by the teacher's personality and his views [cf. Oyama 1979; Funakoshi 1994; Habersetzer 1994]. The development of a school or organizational division is affected by social factors, especially human weakness. A reluctance to comply with the master-teacher's style can lead to the formation of separate, but very similar Schools [cf. Sieber, Cynarski 2003, 2004; Cynarski, Sieber 2007; Cynarski 2014b]. The gradual institutionalization of a particular form of martial arts, and the development of its organizational structure, follow [Cynarski, Walczak 2009].

The unique strengths of Zendo karate Tai-te-tao include: 1) not succumbing to extreme commercialization; 2) the rejection of competitive sports; 3) attention to teaching real self-defence techniques within the schools; 4) the requirements for theoretical knowledge and ethics; and 5) a simplified curriculum, divided into five 'kyu' degrees and three 'dan' degrees (only two student and two master forms).

Conclusions

In Zendo karate Tai-te-tao both educational and utilitarian values – (in terms of its technical structure, curriculum and humanistic content) – are found. This is a School, style and direction in karate which was founded 40 years ago in Europe, but which has also gained recognition in Japan. The registration of the DFK organization, which is responsible for the further development of the style, is a manifestation of its institutionalization. Then came
the transmission of the teaching method and the succession of the leader of Honbu. The school is led, developed and improved by 2nd dai-soke – meijin L. Sieber 10 dan.

Over the years the techniques of the School have evolved. As a result, the current image of the technique in schools outside the mainstream, as well as in the Honbu and outside it, is somewhat different.

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40 lat Zendo karate Tao-te-tao i Idokan karate (1975–2015)

Słowa kluczowe: sztuki walki, budo, karate, historia, wartości

Abstrakt


Wnioski. W Zendo karate Tao-te-tao znajdujemy wartości edukacyjne i ułatwiane (skuteczność w samoobronie). Wymyka one ze struktury technicznej, programu nauczania i ideowej, humanistycznej zawartości. Jest to szkoła, styl i kierunek w karate, który powstał 40 lat temu w Europie, ale zyskał uznanie także w Japonii. W tym czasie następuje modyfikacja sfery technicznej i ewolucja programu nauczania.