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

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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 2005; Cynarski, Sieber 2007; Cynarski 2009; Sieber 2011; Sieber, Cynarski 2013]. 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 Froetschl 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 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.

In 1999, Josef Bachmeier with the help of Frank Uebrueck, compiled and published the first book about



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



Photo 2. Attack – *ganmen tate-zuki*, defence – *koken-uke/shotei-uke*. 16th Summer Camp IPA, 2008 [RO “Dojo Budokan”]

this School and its style [cf. Bachmeier, Uebrueck 1999]. GM Sieber subsequently combined *Zendo karate Tai-te-tao* with Wally Strauss’s concept of *ido* thus declaring the existence of *Idokan karate* [Sieber 2001; cf. Cynarski 2013].

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

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 Jiu-Jitsu 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, Mytskan 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 Sedlmeier 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 *han-shi* in the history of Polish *karate*, after Jan Dyduch (8 dan, *Oyama karate*) and Tomasz Piotrkowicz (8 dan, *Gosoku-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; Lukasz 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, Obodynski, Litwiniuk 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, Obodynski 2005]. *Tameshiwari* 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* (*jujutsu-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

Tab. 1. *Zendo karate Tai-te-tao / Idokan karate* – by teaching *Honbu* and *dai-soke* Lothar Sieber (as of March 6, 2015)

ordinal	name	degree/zendo	degree/karatedo	country
1	Lothar Sieber	10 dan	9 dan	Germany
2	Wojciech J. Cynarski	8 dan	8 dan	Poland
3	Hannelore Sieber	8 dan	5 dan	Germany
4	Christian Brandt	4 dan	-	Germany
5	Bodo Blumentritt	4 dan	-	Germany
6	Gerhard Jung	4 dan	-	Germany
7	Paweł Szlachta	2 dan		Poland
8	Siegfried Sedlmeier	1 dan	-	Germany
9	Klaus Holzer	1 dan	-	Germany
10	Ulrich Diekoetter	1 dan	-	Germany

[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: *iaido* (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

Tło teoretyczne. Perspektywę teoretyczną dla przeprowadzonych badań tworzy humanistyczna teoria sztuk walki oraz historia kultury fizycznej.

Problem i cel. Autorzy podjęli problem opisu edukacyjnych i innych wartości oraz struktury technicznej, nauczania i humanistycznej zawartości stylu *Zendo karate Tai-te-tao* (zwanego też *karate Idokan*), w jego ewolucji.

Metoda. Przeprowadzono jakościowe badania źródeł (teksty Petera K. Jahnke, analiza dokumentów) i literatury przedmiotu, oraz zastosowano długoletnią obserwację uczestniczącą. To było realizowane od roku 1993 w *Honbu* (w Monachium) i w kilku organizacjach sztuk walki.

Wyniki. Autorzy przedstawiają kronikę wydarzeń, ludzi – posiadaczy czarnych pasów – ćwiczących obecnie, strukturę techniczną i program nauczania, a także szczególne wartości humanistyczne tej właśnie szkoły, stylu i kierunku w karate. Unikalnymi atutami *Zendo karate Tai-te-tao* są: 1) nie uleganie skrajnej komercjalizacji; 2) odrzucenie rywalizacji sportowej; 3) dbałość o nauczanie w ramach tej szkoły techniki realnej samoobrony; 4) wymagania w zakresie wiedzy teoretycznej i etyki; 5) uproszczony program nauczania, podzielony na 5 stopni 'kyu' i 3 stopnie 'dan' (tylko 2 formy uczniowskie i 2 mistrzowskie).

Wnioski. W *Zendo karate Tai-Te-Tao* znajdujemy wartości edukacyjne i użyteczne (skuteczność w samoobronie). Wynikają 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.