

The Development of Karate in China: Using Literature Review to Explore Karate from the Perspective of Chinese

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Abstract

Karate is growing rapidly in China. As of 2021, 21 provinces, cities, and autonomous regions in China have established karate associations, and there are around 300,000-400,000 karate practitioners in China. However, little research has been done on the understanding and discussion of karate among the Chinese. This paper used literature review to reveal the Chinese perspectives on karate. The “karate” was used as a keyword to search relevant newspapers and articles in the People’s Daily and CNKI databases. Besides, books about karate from the National Library of China were compiled. The results showed that since the 1980s, the debate on karate has gradually emerged in China. From the 1980s to the 1990s, the Chinese have always held the understanding that karate originated from the Chinese martial arts of the Tang Dynasty. This understanding may have been brought into China by the Chinese who had been to Japan. However, this understanding is unreliable, and many Chinese martial art researchers accept this theory uncritically. Since 2010, with the introduction of karate majors in some Chinese universities, research on karate has increased rapidly. Chinese researchers have put forward a wide range of theories on the historical origin of karate by using the documents of China and Japan, such as Theory of the Thirty-six families from Min (久米三十六姓輸入説), Theory of development from Okinawan dance and so forth.

Keywords: China, Martial arts, sports culture, Japanese Budo, Karate, 2020 Tokyo Olympics

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Introduction

Karate is a martial art developed in the Ryukyu Kingdom. It originated from the indigenous Ryukyuan martial arts under the influence of Chinese martial arts. In 1964, the Japan Karate Federation was established in Tokyo, Japan, in order to unify the management of karate and popularize and promote it. In 1970, the World Union of Karate Organization (renamed World Karate Federation in 1993) was established with 33 member countries and regions. In the same year, the first World Championships were held in Tokyo. In 1999, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) recognized karate as an international competitive sport. Karate became an Olympic sport in the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics. One hundred ninety-nine countries around the world are members of the World Karate Federation, and there are over 130 million amateurs in karate (JKF, 2018).

Although karate has already been an international martial arts sport, there is a lack of relevant research on the internationalization of karate. This paper searched the keywords “tote”(唐手), “karate-do”(空手道), and “karate”(空手) in the “National Institute of Informatics” database in Japan. As of July 13, 2021, after removing irrelevant texts, there are only four research papers and four conference reports on the current state and international spread of karate. For example, Kishimoto (1985) conducted a survey on Americans’ perceptions of karate. Hamasaki (2013) studied the spread of karate in the United States. Wojciech (2013) conducted a survey of changes in European karate in recent years. These studies above only investigated and studied the current status of the spread of karate in Europe and the United States. Karate spread in Asia a few years later than in Europe and the United States, but it spread quickly. Among the 49 countries and regions in Asia, 44 countries and regions are members of the World Karate Federation (WKF, 2021). However, there is little research on the spread of karate in Asia. Therefore, this study takes China as the research subject in Asia to find out the development of karate.

The reason for choosing China is that China is a great country in martial arts. In Chinese martial arts movies (action movies, kung fu movies), karate is often portrayed as the underdog and the loser. For example, in the Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan movies, the story usually ends with Chinese martial arts defeating Japanese karate. However, karate become more and more popular in China. In 2006, the General Administration of Sport of China decided to introduce karate as a national competition. Since the Chinese Karate Association (CKA) was established in 2008, the Chinese karate team has won two gold medals in international karate events (i.e., 16th Asian Games and 20th World Championship). Karate was officially included in the National Games and Youth Games of the People’s Republic of China in 2017. As of 2021, 21 provinces, cities, and autonomous regions in China have established karate associations, and there are around 300,000-400,000 karate practitioners in China (CKA, 2016). In a word, karate is growing rapidly in China.

This paper proposed two research questions to understand the development and current situation of the spread of karate in China. How did karate develop in China? How do Chinese people understand karate? Zhang (2004) found that karate was introduced to China in the early 1980s and developed rapidly. Karate developed most rapidly in Shanghai. Nowadays, many Shanghai universities have established karate clubs and hold karate championships. Cheng (2004) found that in 1990, Mr. Wang Zhaoqi, the director of Shanghai Sports Palace, invited Mr. Mekarukenichi, a famous Japanese Okinawa karate master, to hold the first karate training course in Shanghai Sports Palace. About 100 people participated in the training. Students of this training class, such as Gong Han, Ceng Xiaolong, and Zhang Lei, established karate dojos in Luwan District, Hongqiao District, Huangpu District, and other areas in Shanghai. These pioneers played an essential role in the spread of karate in China. Zhang & Chen (2008) found that On April 25, 1999, with the approval of the World Karate Federation, China's first karate management organization "Shanghai Wushu Association Karate Committee" was established. Mr. Mekarukenichi was appointed as the first consultant and head coach. At present, karate is developing well in China, especially in Shanghai. Twenty universities, including Shanghai Fudan University and Foreign Studies University, have established karate clubs and opened karate courses. Zhang (2009) found that since the Chinese Karate Association (CKA) was established in 2008, CKA has organized national coaches and referee training courses, formed a national team, and worked hard to join the World Karate Federation and the Asian Karate Federation. Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong, Anhui, Henan, Shanxi, and other provinces and cities, as well as colleges and universities such as Beijing Sports University and Wuhan Sports Institute, have established karate competitions teams.

These findings suggest that previous researchers have clarified the background and process of the spread of karate in China. About 40 years have passed since karate was introduced to China, and there has been no systematic study of how the Chinese understand and discuss karate. Therefore, this study investigated the reality of Chinese people's perception of karate. This study not only helps to clarify the actual development of karate in China but also sheds light on the current state of internationalization and dissemination of karate. It is necessary for Japan to investigate and study the spread of karate in other countries in order to understand the intentions of foreigners toward the practice of karate. This will lead to further exploration of the direction of the future spread and development of karate in the world. This paper contributes to the international development of Japanese martial arts.

Method

This paper used literature review to reveal the Chinese perspectives on karate. The “karate” was used as a keyword to search relevant newspapers and articles in the People’s Daily and CNKI databases. Besides, books about karate from the National Library of China were compiled.

People’s Daily database: It contains articles that have appeared in text form in People’s Daily since its inception in May 1946. The full articles can be read by searching the titles and keywords in the text. The People’s Daily was chosen for this study because it was the earliest newspaper founded in post-war China. Moreover, it is a large publication, and it has a great influence on public opinion.

CNKI database: CNKI allows searching academic journals, newspapers, dissertations, academic conference papers, and so on published in China (excluding Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau). CNKI was chosen because it is one of the most authoritative databases in China’s academic field and it is a platform that provides the richest knowledge information resources and the most effective knowledge dissemination and digital learning, which enables the efficient sharing of knowledge resources across the society.

National Library of China: The National Library of China is the national library of the People’s Republic of China and is one of the largest libraries in the world. It contains over 41 million items as of December 2020. It holds the largest collection of Chinese literature and historical documents in the world and covers an area of 280,000 square meters. The National Library of China was chosen because of its rich resources and reliability.

Results

Overall literature on karate in China

First, we searched the databases of People’s Daily and CNKI with “karate” as the keyword and then checked the collections of the National Library of China. After eliminating irrelevant articles, we found a total of 463 karate-related documents, as shown in Figure 1 below.

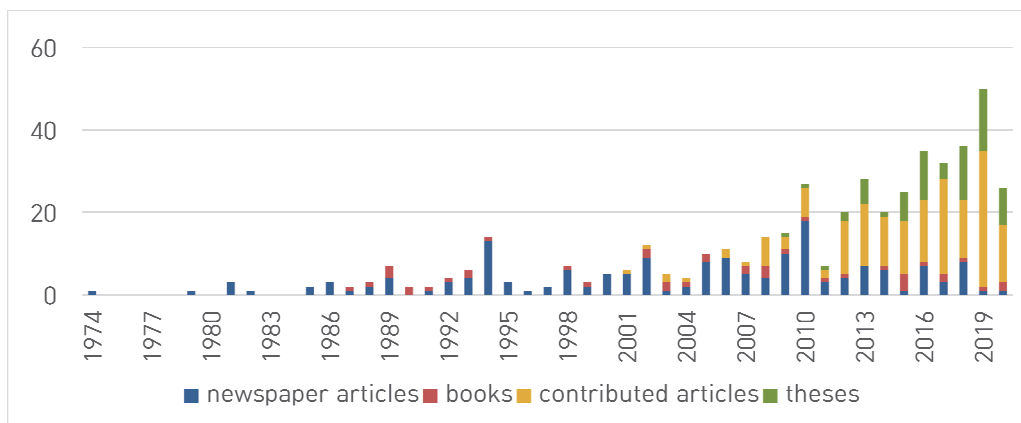


Figure 1. Annual change in the number of literatures on karate in China (until 2020)

As seen in Figure 1, the literature on karate first appeared in newspaper articles in 1974. In the 46 years from 1974 to 2020, there were 170 news reports, 179 contributed articles, 72 theses (master’s and doctoral dissertations), and 42 books on karate.

1. General information about the circulation of news reports

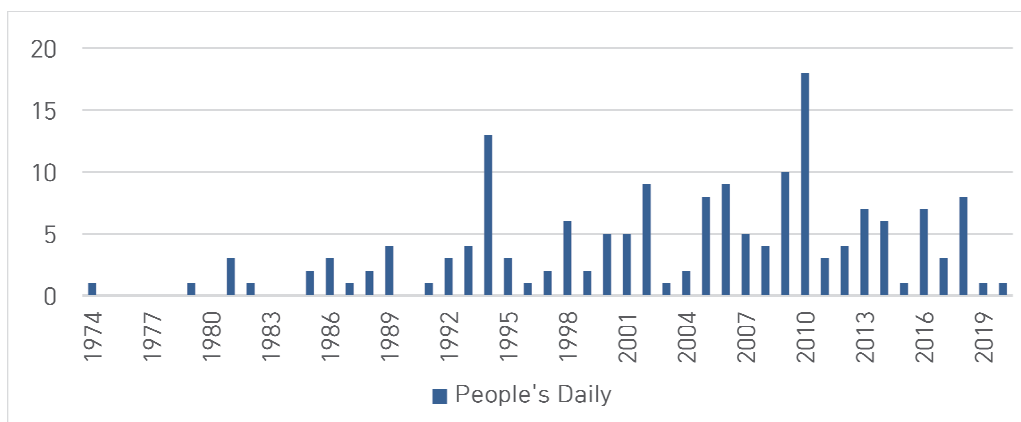


Figure 2. Annual change in the number of articles on karate in People’s Daily (until 2020)

From 1974 to 2020, the number of articles about karate published in the People’s Daily was 170. The first time “karate” appeared in a newspaper was in 1974. As shown in Figure 2, from 1991 onwards, karate was reported in newspapers every year, and by 1994, the number of articles increased rapidly. One of the reasons for this rapid growth can be attributed to the inclusion of karate as an official sport for the first time at the 12th Asian Games in 1994. The highest number of reports in

2010 can be attributed to the fact that the 16th Asian Games were held in China in 2010. Chinese athletes competed in the karate event and won two gold medals for the first time. It is believed that the results of these competitions attracted the interest of newspaper journalists.

Specifically, the content of karate-related articles in 170 stories in People’s Daily from 1974 to 2020 can be categorized as shown in Figure 3.

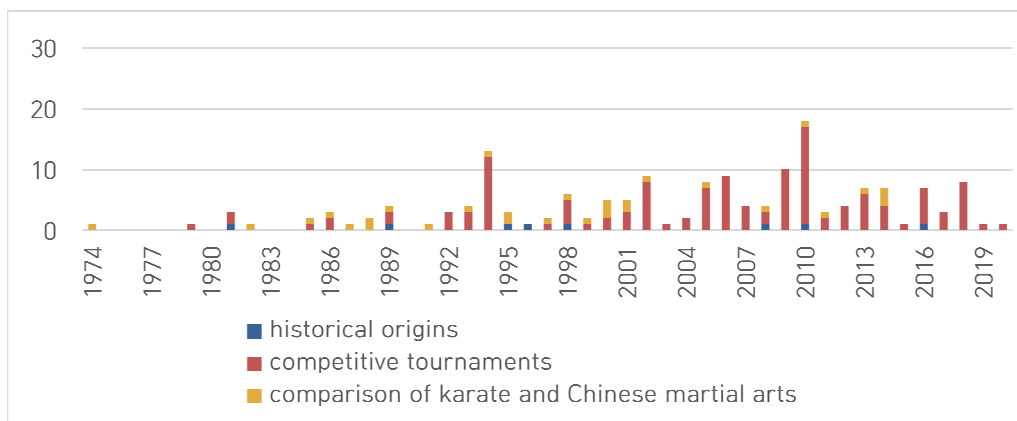


Figure 3. Annual change in the number of articles on karate per category in People’s Daily (until 2020)

From 1974 to 2020, the three main themes of articles related to karate were “historical origins” (8 articles), “competitive tournaments” (132 articles), and “comparison of karate and Chinese martial arts” (30 articles). It can be seen that the interest of the journalists of the People’s Daily is in “competitive tournaments” of karate.

In “historical origins” the historical origins, spiritual culture, and technical movements of karate, especially its historical relationship with Chinese martial arts, are introduced; in “competitive events” the rules, dates, and competitions of karate tournaments are introduced. For example, the karate competition at the 2010 Asian Games was reported several times. The article “comparison of karate and Chinese martial arts” presents the development of Chinese martial arts, which can provide a reference for karate. For example, the future development of Chinese martial arts can refer to the dan system of karate.

2. All images of karate books

In this paper, we searched the National Library of China bibliographic database with the keyword “karate” and found 42 books on karate as of 2020, after removing the irrelevant books, as shown in Figure 4 below.

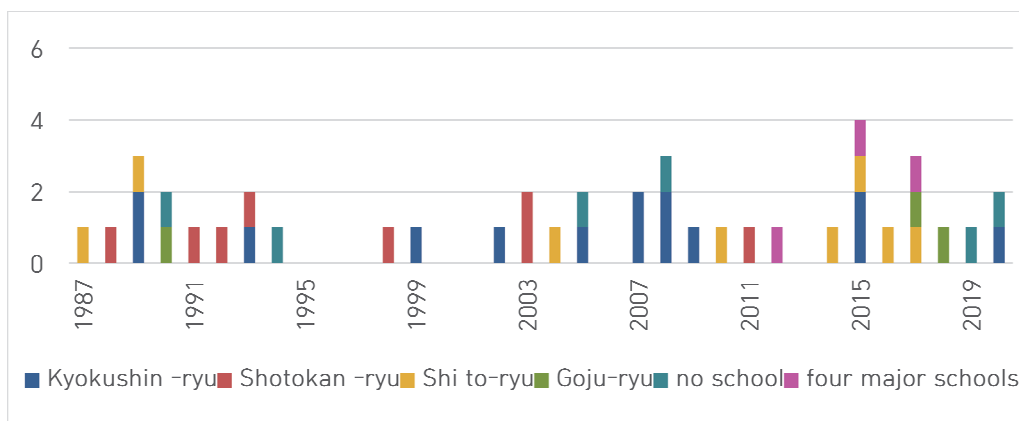


Figure 4. Books on karate in the National Library of China (1987-2020)

The contents of Figure 4 reveal the following points.

(1) Of these 42 books specializing in karate, 33 are original books, 6 are Japanese translation books, and 3 are English translation books.

(2) Classifying these books according to the schools of karate, the number of books of “Kyokushin -ryu”(極真流) karate is the largest (14 books), followed by “Shotokan -ryu”(松濤流) and “Shi to-ryu”(糸東流) with 8 books each, and “Goju-ryu”(剛柔流) with 3 books. There are 6 books on no-school karate. In addition, there are three books on the “four major schools”(四大流派).

(3) From 1987 to 2020, the most karate books were published by Beijing Sports University Press (11 books), followed by People’s Sports Press (4 books), Hubei Science and Technology Press (3 books), Chengdu Times Press (3 books), and People’s Public Security University Press (2 books).

3. All images of karate research

After searching the data in the CNKI using the keyword “karate” and removing irrelevant papers, a total of 251 research papers remained, as shown in Figure 5.

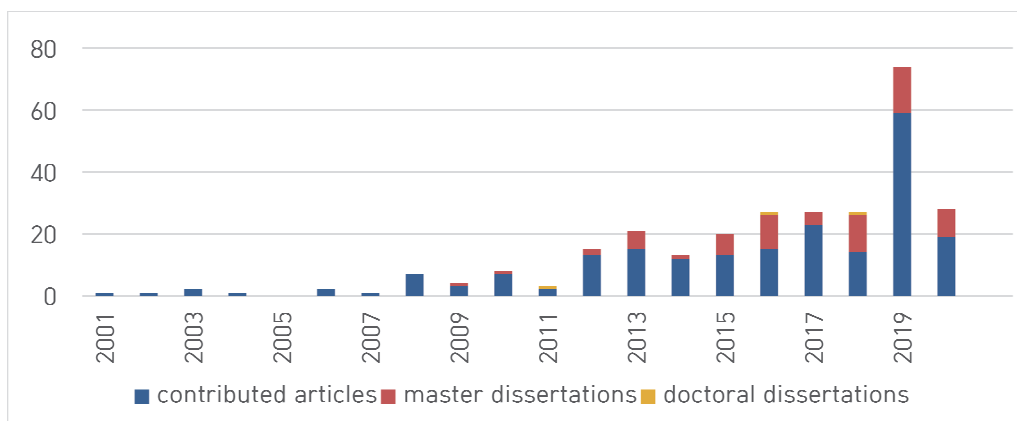


Figure 5 Annual change in the number of research papers on karate in China (until 2020)

Figure 5 shows that from 2001 to 2020, there were 251 research papers on karate in the CNKI database. Among them, 179 are journal-contributed articles, and 72 are dissertations (69 master theses and 3 doctoral dissertations). Before 2001, there were no research papers on karate in China.

Starting from 2006, the number of research papers on karate increased year by year, and the number of papers grew rapidly in the 10 years from 2007 to 2019. Especially in 2019, the number of papers reached 48, the highest number in the last 10 years. This rapid growth is attributed to the decision of the General Administration of Sport of China to introduce karate as a national sporting event in 2006. The interest of Chinese researchers in karate has been attracted.

Specifically, the content of the 251 articles on karate written by Chinese researchers can be divided into the following categories.

First, research on the history of karate (e.g., the origin and development of karate): a total of 7 articles (3%). Second, comparative studies of various martial arts (e.g., comparison of spiritual culture, technical movements, and competition rules of Chinese martial arts, Korean Taekwondo, and Japanese karate): a total of 34 articles (13%). Third, research on karate training methods (e.g., techniques, tactics, rules, etc.): a total of 67 articles (27%). Fourth, research on the spread of karate in China (e.g., the current situation of karate development in schools and regions, the actual situation of karate competitions in various regions, etc.): a total of 143 articles (57%).

As mentioned above, the number of studies on the actual status of the spread of karate in China

(i.e., the fourth part) greatly exceeds the number of studies in the other three parts. This indicates that Chinese researchers are interested in the actual status of the spread of karate in China. In the following, we will use karate-related newspaper articles, books, and research papers to specifically examine the understanding of karate in China.

Chinese perceptions of karate from newspapers, books, and research papers

1. The 1980s and 1990s: Karate is considered by the Chinese to have originated from the Chinese Tang Dynasty martial arts

“Japanese traditional culture has a close relationship with China, and martial arts are no exception ...Karate, which was developed through technical improvements after Chinese martial arts were introduced to Japan during the Tang Dynasty, is similar to Chinese martial arts “*Nanquan*” (南拳) (A country and a region of martial arts, People’s Daily, Beijing, Dec. 12, 1981).

The “*Nanquan*” mentioned here refers to the traditional martial arts of southern China, such as “*Wing Chun*”(咏春拳)and “*White Crane*”(白鹤拳).

The understanding of the above newspaper reporter is that karate originated in China during the Tang Dynasty. Such an understanding is also found in the perceptions of other Chinese, especially Chinese martial artists. For example, in 1987, Lee Changtuo, a martial arts teacher at the Shenyang Institute of Physical Education, published the book named “*Japanese Martial Arts Techniques of Karate*”. This was the first professional book on karate written in China. This book introduced the history of karate, training methods, basic techniques, “*kata*”(型), and “*kumite*” (組手) competition methods. Regarding the understanding of karate, Mr. Lee Changtuo gives the following introduction to the origin of karate.

“Karate first originated in China during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). It is a physical combat sport developed from ancient martial arts, using hands and feet to overwhelm opponents. As early as the middle of the 14th century, martial arts were introduced to the Ryukyu Islands of Japan along with other cultures. Later, through years of practice, innovation, and active promotion by Japanese martial artists, it has developed into an international sport for physical fitness and self-defense. Besides, people love it very much” (Li,1987).

In addition, the origins of karate were also introduced in the book “*Japanese Karate in the Beginning*” written by Yuan (1989), a Chinese martial arts master and professor at Wenzhou University, as follows.

“Until 60 years ago, the Japanese called it Tang Hand, because karate has its roots in China. There are historical records that around the Tang Dynasty in China, Chinese martial arts began to spread to the Ryukyu Islands in Japan, where it developed and flourished”.

It can be seen that in the 1980s, most sources on karate indicated that karate originated in China during the Tang Dynasty. These statements can also be found in many karate literatures from 1990 onwards. For example, *The Complete Book of Illustrated Karate Techniques* by Yan in 1990, *Modern Karate* by Yi in 1992, and *Karate Throwing Techniques* in 1994 all mentioned the origin of karate with the martial arts of the Tang Dynasty in China. However, this paper considers these statements to be unsubstantiated speculations and legends because they did not use historical sources to prove their statements.

It is true that there is a deep connection between Chinese martial arts and karate, but Japanese scholars, through historical investigation, generally agree that karate originated from the martial art of “*te*”(手), which is unique to Okinawa. Karate joined the Chinese martial arts and developed under the influence of the Japanese martial arts. For example, the world’s first specialized book on karate “*Ryukyū Kempo tote*” (1922), written by Funakoshi, the father of modern karate, mentioned that “Karate is a martial art unique to Okinawa. In the era of Tang Dynasty worship, Okinawans studied Chinese martial arts and fused them with local martial arts, and named it ‘*tote*’(唐手). It is a martial art that draws on the strengths and techniques of Chinese martial arts.”

In 2005, the Okinawa Prefectural Council stated on the historical origins of karate that “Chinese martial arts were introduced to Okinawa around 1400 to 1500. Since then, Okinawans actively adopted the merits of Chinese martial arts and applied them to karate and created the present-day karate” (Okinawa Prefectural Council, 2019).

In general, in the 1980s and 1990s, both Chinese newspaper reporters and authors of karate books claimed that karate was introduced to Japan during China’s Tang Dynasty. Although this claim was popular at the time, there is no historical basis for it.

With globalization and the rapid development of transportation and communication technologies, knowledge and culture are exchanged in a borderless environment. Since 2000, international karate organizations such as “International Karate Organization Kyokushinkaikan” and “Shotokan Karate-do International Federation” have established branches in China, and many karate practitioners have also gone to Japan to practice karate.

In 2006, the General Administration of Sport of China decided to promote karate in China. In 2007, with the assistance of the Japan Karate Federation, a China-wide karate training program was organized, including a national karate coaches training course, a national karate tournament, and the formation of a Chinese karate national team. The exchange of karate between China and Japan became frequent. In this context, how did Chinese people understand karate in the 2000s? In the next section, this question will be discussed.

2. 2000s: Chinese believe that the origin of karate was influenced by the “no-martial-arts policy” of the Ryukyu Kingdom

In 2003, Liu Tongwei and Dai Youxiang, professors in the Department of Martial Arts at the Shanghai Institute of Physical Education, and Jia Ping, who had lived and practiced karate in Japan for about 10 years, published the book “Karate”. This book discusses the relationship between the origins of karate and the “no weapons policy” of the Ryukyu Kingdom, as follows.

“In the history of Okinawa, there were two movements to “no weapons policy”(禁武政策). Against this historical background, a folk martial art based on the ancient martial arts of the region and drawing on the strengths of traditional Chinese martial arts emerged in the Okinawa region of Japan, named “Okinawan tote” (唐手) (a prototype of karate). It is a sport to strengthen the body by using one’s own body as a weapon and using only one’s fist without a weapon in hand (Liu, Dai, & Jia, 2003).”

In addition, the relationship between the “no weapons policy” and karate was explained as follows in *Introduction to the Sport of Karate* by Zhang (2009), a professor in the Department of Martial Arts at Shenyang Sports Institute and a researcher in Chinese martial arts.

“Karate is Japanese martial art. In ancient Ryukyu, Japan, weapons were forbidden to be used due to the long-standing “no weapons policy”. Therefore, people had to create self-defense skills. Especially in the early 17th century, the carrying and keeping of weapons were strictly forbidden, so the upper class in Ryukyu referred to Chinese martial arts and created a unique fighting technique, which was the original karate (Zhang, 2009).”

After 2000, as the exchange of karate between China and Japan became frequent, the statement that “karate is a martial art of the Chinese Tang Dynasty that was transmitted from China to Japan” almost disappeared. Instead, the Chinese used the historical fact of the Ryukyu Kingdom’s “no weapons policy” to explain the origin of karate in Okinawa. Their new views can be found in many newspaper articles, writings, and research papers on karate in the 2000s. For example, Gu (2003), Zhang (2007), Lyu (2008), and Zhang (2009) all mentioned that the origin of karate is directly related to the “no weapons policy”.

However, as research into the history of karate progresses, some researchers in Okinawan studies have questioned the notion that the “no weapons policy” is directly related to the origin of karate. In 1613, “*Satsuma Domain*”(薩摩藩) found that the “no weapons policy” implemented by the Ryukyu Kingdom only prohibited the use of weapons such as swords, but not their possession of all weapons, which was a relatively lenient regulation. In the policy, first, the possession of firearms was prohibited. Second, the private possession of weapons by princes and nobles, magistrates, and clerics was allowed. Third, weapons had to be possessed in Satsuma City after registration through the local government office. The possession of weapons (except guns) and the practice of weapons were not prohibited.

Fourth, the type and specifications of swords had to be approved by the local government office. It can be found that the “no weapons policy” at that time did not prohibit the possession of weapons (except guns) and the practice of weapons. (Makoto & Fujiwara,1986).

To sum up, in the 2000s, Chinese people believed that the origin and development of karate were influenced by the “no weapons policy”. But such statement is not credible, and this statement may have been brought to China by Chinese who have visited Japan. For example, in March 2005, Wang Tao, a reporter for *Chinese Martial Arts* (a magazine published by the General Administration of Sport of China), visited Japan at the invitation of the Japanese government and stayed for 11 days. During his stay in Japan, he examined the history and current status of various traditional martial arts in Japan. Later, his research results were published in the Chinese Sports News (March 12, 2005). He writes in his article, “As Fumito Sugimoto, the director of the Japanese Karate Matsudo Association, says in his introduction to the origins of karate, ‘In ancient Ryukyu, Japan, all weapons were banned due to a long-standing no-weapons policy, so people referred to Chinese martial arts and created the unique fighting technique of bare-handed karate, which was the original karate. It was called ‘tote’ and its original meaning was ‘a fist from China’” (Wang Tao, 2005). Thus, the statement that the origin of karate was influenced by the “no weapons policy” of the Ryukyu Kingdom is uncritically accepted by the Chinese.

After 2010, with the establishment of the National Student Karate Association of China, several sports universities established karate majors. From 2010 to 2020, 160 contributed papers and 71 dissertations (68 master’s theses and 3 doctoral dissertations) were published by karate researchers at Beijing University of Physical Education, Wuhan Institute of Physical Education, and Hunan Normal University. From 2010 to 2020, 160 contributed papers and 71 dissertations (68 master’s theses and 3 doctoral dissertations) were published by karate researchers at Beijing University of Physical Education, Wuhan Institute of Physical Education, and Hunan Normal University. It can be seen that karate research is rapidly developing. In the next section, this paper will describe how karate is understood in China after 2010.

3. After the 2010s: Various theories on the historical origins of karate

In 2010, Xu, a professor at Beijing Sports University and secretary-general of the Chinese College Karate Association, discussed the historical origins of karate in his book “Karate”, as follows.

“The Japanese karate texts *Written by Oshima*(大島筆記) recorded the fighting techniques taught by “*kosanku*”(公相君) and “*manngetsu*”(満月), officials who came to the Ryukyu Kingdom from China. The names “*kosanku*” and “*manngetsu*” remain in the “*kata*” of modern karate so that its origin is not forgotten.

When the Ryukyu Islands were conquered by the Satsuma Han of Japan in 1609, the “no weapons policy” was implemented, so the people of the Ryukyu Islands secretly learned and practiced Chinese martial arts in order to defend themselves. Some of them traveled to China to study in Southern Shaolin, Fujian Province, and when they returned to Japan, they combined their native fighting techniques and created the unique “tote”, which was the original karate” (Xu, 2010).

In addition, Chen (2011), a karate researcher at the Shanghai Sports Institute and head referee of the Chinese College Karate Association, discussed the origin of karate as follows.

Between 1372 and 1866. The Ming and Qing dynasties dispatched their envoys to the Ryukyu Kingdom 23 times. Most of these envoys were martial arts masters selected from the military, who had an important influence on the formation of early karate. Nowadays, the names of the envoys “kosanku” and “wansu”(汪埴) are still kept in the “kata” (型) of karate to commemorate the merits of the Chinese martial arts instructors and not to forget their origins (Chen, 2011).

In addition, Ma (2015), a karate researcher at Xi’an Sports Institute, discussed the origin of karate as follows.

1) Theory of the Thirty-six families from Min (久米三十六姓輸入説)

In 1392, Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang of the Ming Dynasty gave the Ryukyu Kingdom a group of professional workers called “*Kumi 36 surname*” (久米三十六姓)··· Later, these people settled in the Kume village of Ryukyu and brought advanced arts, science, and skills to the islands. At the same time, Chinese martial arts were also introduced, and karate originated there.

2) *No Weapons Policy* (禁武政策)

In 1609, the “Satsuma Domain” of Japan invaded the Ryukyus. After the Ryukyu Kingdom became a vassal state of Japan, the “Satsuma Domain” implemented a “no weapons policy”. In order to resist the oppression of the “Satsuma Domain”, the Ryukyu people learned Chinese martial arts from Chinese immigrants and combined them with the local Ryukyu martial arts, which is the original karate.

3) Theory of the development of karate by the martial artist “*kosanku*”

According to Japanese scholar Ryohei Tobe’s *Written by Oshima*, the Chinese martial artist “*kosanku*” came to the Ryukyu Islands and taught several martial arts to the local people.

4) Theory of development from Okinawan dance (舞方からの発展説)

“*Maikata*”(舞方) is a Ryukyu dance with martial arts characteristics. Numerous karate masters claim that karate is a fusion of “*Maikata*” and the Chinese martial arts introduced to the Ryukyu (Ma, 2015).

Although the above researchers have made various claims about the historical origins of karate, in general they believe that the origins of karate are directly related to the Chinese martial arts. However, because of the boundaries of the sources they use, they do not argue how karate is actually related to Chinese martial arts.

To date, a more systematic study of the historical origins of karate in relation to China has been conducted by Zheng et al. (2016), who has several years of experience studying in Japan. From November 2016 to June 2017, Zheng and his research team serialized the research paper “The origin of karate from Fujian Nanquan: An examination of the flow of sports culture” in the top Chinese sports journal “Sports Science Research”. One of the papers on the historical origins of karate was published in 2016. The summary of the paper is as follows.

“The Ryukyu “*tote*” originated from “*Fujian Nanquan*”(福建南拳) and was brought to the Ryukyus by the “*Kumi 36 surname*” in the late 14th century. The Ming and Qing dynasties’ envoys and the Chinese students in the Ryukyu Islands injected the northern Chinese martial arts into the Ryukyu “*tote*” and enriched the technical system of the Ryukyu “*tote*”.

This paper mentioned that Japanese karate originated in Fujian Province, China, and presented the following six pieces of evidence.

1) In *Written by Oshima*, a military officer named “*kosanku*”, who was an envoy of the Qing Dynasty, came to Okinawa to popularize Chinese martial arts.

2) In 1872, Higaonna Kanryo (1853-1915), an Okinawan martial artist, came to China. He lived in Fuzhou City, Fujian Province for 15 years and studied southern Chinese martial arts. Upon his return to Japan, he established a karate club in Okinawa and popularized karate.

3) The famous Okinawan martial art book *Okinawa Martial Arts Journal*(沖縄武備誌) was copied from the Fujian “*White Crane*” and handed down by Miyagi Chojun (1888-1953), the founder of the “*Goju-Ryu*”.

4) In the world’s first professional karate book published in Japan, *Ryukyu Kempo Tangote*(1922), the “*拳譜*” (*kempo manual*) containing the of “*Fujian Nanquan*” was recorded.

5) The “*kata*” names of Karate are pronounced in the Chinese dialect of Fujian. For example, “*Seisan*” (十三), “*Seipai*” (十八), “*Sanseru*” (三十六).

6) Karate techniques are the same as those of Fujian Nanquan. For example, the basic technique of karate, *Sanchin*, is the same as that of Fujian Nanquan in terms of stance, footwork, and power (Zheng et al., 2016). As mentioned above, Zheng used books and historical sources such as *Written by Oshima*, *Ryukyu Kempo tote*, and *Okinawa Martial Arts Journal* to analyze, historical figures and events that have a deep relationship between Chinese martial arts and Japanese karate, and argued that “*Fujian Nanquan*” is the source of karate.

Research in this study still needs further investigation. For example, Higaonna Kanryo, an important figure in the history of karate and a representative karate master of the Meiji period, lived in Fuzhou City, Fujian Province, China, for 15 years and studied Chinese martial arts. However, this research does not mention this person.

In addition, this study mentioned that Higaonna Kanryo, an important figure in the history of karate and an Okinawan martial artist, once came to China to study southern Chinese martial arts. However, it did not reveal whom Higaonna Kanryo studied with during his 15 years in China, what kind of martial arts he learned, and how he systematized and taught his martial arts to the people of his home country upon his return.

Moreover, the historical sources used in this paper are mostly secondary sources that have been discussed so far, with little development and discussion of the use of primary sources. As a result, the findings lack originality. In order to clarify the relationship between karate and Chinese martial arts, this paper argued that it is necessary for China and Japan to cooperate in developing more first-hand sources and increasing the evidence to clarify historical facts.

Conclusions

This paper used literature review to reveal the Chinese perspectives on karate. The “karate” was used as a keyword to search relevant newspapers and articles in the People’s Daily and CNKI databases. Besides, books about karate from the National Library of China were compiled. The results show that since the 1980s, the debate on karate has gradually emerged in China. From the 1980s to the 1990s, the Chinese have always held the understanding that karate originated from the Chinese martial arts of the Tang Dynasty. This thought may have been brought into China by the Chinese who had been to Japan. However, this understanding is unreliable, and many Chinese martial art researchers accept the theory uncritically. Since 2010, with the introduction of karate majors in some Chinese universities, researches on karate have increased rapidly. Chinese researchers have put forward a wide range of theories on the historical origin of karate by using the documents of China and Japan, such as “久米三十六姓輸入説”, “舞方からの発展説” and so forth.

The findings of this study showed that Chinese seem to be trying their best to prove that the origin of karate is Chinese. This paper argues that these studies could lead to the development of karate in China, i.e., promoting karate equals promoting Chinese culture, although this is only a conjecture. As a future research direction, it is necessary to conduct interviews with real karate practitioners. To learn about their understanding of karate and their motivation to practice karate. This will help to better understand why karate has become popular in China. Besides, in order to gain insight into the actual spread and development of karate in China, a field trip to China to participate in local karate clubs and conduct field research will be the future research direction. Based on the data, research, and analysis, a broader and deeper understanding of the educational significance and contribution of karate to the Chinese people will be the subject of future research.

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