

The Bubishi is both a creator and a product of history. In this section, I will examine the historical origins of this work and show its impact on history. Perhaps we might better understand what the Bubishi represents by breaking down the components of the word itself. The ideogram pronounced *bu* means “military.” The ideogram *bi* means “to provide or prepare.” The ideogram *shi* means “record.” Together, they mean “a manual of military preparation.” In the context of karate, the Bubishi represents the patriarchal source of knowledge, a fountain from which flows strength and wisdom for those brave enough to embrace its spirit. Providing disciples with the ancient masters’ secrets, the Bubishi has for generations preserved the original precepts upon which the civil fighting traditions rest; teachings now overshadowed by more base pursuits.

Disclosing the original means and methods of orthodox Chinese *gong-fu* (also known as *quanfa* or “fist way,” which the Japanese call *kempo*), the Bubishi conclusively imparts both the utilitarian and nonutilitarian values of the civil fighting traditions. In so doing, it reveals the magnitude of karate-do, and identifies that which lies beyond the immediate results of physical training. With one’s attention turned inward in this way, karate-do becomes a conduit through which a deeper understanding of the self brings one that much closer to realizing one’s position in life in general, and the world in which one dwells.

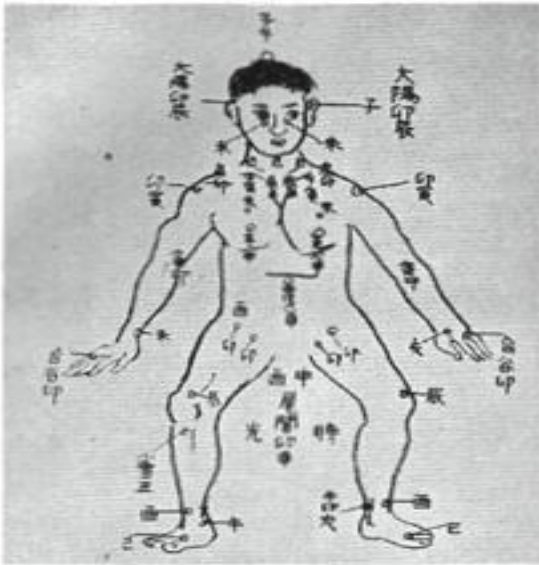
The Impact of the Bubishi on Modern Karate-do

Although the Bubishi is a document peculiar to Monk Fist and White Crane *gongfu*, it achieves an impact of more encompassing proportions. While its exact date of publication and author remain a mystery, it is nevertheless a valuable source of historical information that offers deep insights into karate-do, its history, philosophy, and application. A number of the most recognizable figures in modern karate-do have used it as a reference or plagiarized from it.

Mabuni Kenwa (1889-1952), was a karate genius and *kobu-jutsu* expert who was responsible for bringing together karate-jutsu’s two main streams when he created his Shito-ryu tradition more than half a century ago. In 1934 in the book *Kobo Jizai Karate Kempo Seipai no Kenkyu*, he wrote, “Making a copy of a Chinese book on *kempo* that my venerated master, Itosu Anko, had himself duplicated, I have used the Bubishi in my research and secretly treasured it.” In that same year, Mabuni *Sensei* was the first to make the Bubishi public. By making the Bubishi available to the public, Mabuni Kenwa introduced a legacy so profound that, even to this day, the depth of its magnitude has yet to be fully measured or completely understood.

A significant portion of *Karate-do Kyohan* by Funakoshi Gichin (1868- 1957) is taken directly from the Bubishi.¹ Higashionna Kanryo (1853- 1915) revered it; and his principal disciple, Miyagi Chojun (1888-1953), selected the name Goju-ryu from this text (see Article 13, no. 3, p. 197) to represent his unique tradition and considered it “the bible” of the civil fighting arts. The Bubishi was also used by Shimabukuro Tatsuo (1908-75) when he was establishing his Isshin-ryu karate tradition. The Bubishi had such a profound affect upon Yamaguchi “the Cat” Gogen (1909-89) that he publicly referred to it as his “most treasured text.”

The profound teachings of this document were no doubt gathered over a period of many hundreds of years. So to begin I think it is important to discuss the theories surrounding the origin of this work.



The Two Bubishi

Actually, there are two Bubishi, both of Chinese origin and from Fu-zhou. One is a colossal treatise on the art of war, published in the Ming dynasty (1366-1644); the other, believed to have been produced during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), is that which surfaced in Okinawa. In its native Mandarin Chinese, the ideograms for Bubishi are read “Wu Bei Zhi,” but for the sake of simplicity I shall refer to the text using its Japanese pronunciation instead.

MAO YUANYI’S BUBISHI

This authoritative text on the art of war, not to be confused with

Sun Zi’s treatise, was published in 1621. The author, Mao Yuanyi, was a man of considerable influence well versed in military affairs, and was greatly influenced by his grandfather Mao Kun, who was vice-envoy to the Fujian provincial court. Concerned about his government’s deteriorating military condition, Mao felt impelled to remedy the situation. Spending more than fifteen years and researching over two thousand books, he compiled this prodigious document, which consists of 240 chapters in five parts and ninety-one volumes; today a copy is stored safely within the venerable walls of the Harvard University Library.

Dealing with all military-related subjects, Mao’s Bubishi covers everything from strategic warfare, to naval maneuvers and troop deployment, to close-quarter armed and unarmed combat, and includes maps, charts, illustrations, and diagrams. Chapters 1 through 18 concern military decision-making; Chapters 19 through 51 concern tactics; Chapters 52 through 92 concern military training systems; Chapters 93 through 147 concern logistics; and Chapters 148 through 240 deal with military occupations.

In one section there are various illustrations portraying hand-to-hand combat with and without weapons. This part is believed to have been taken from the eighteen-chapter document *Jixiao Xinshu* (*Kiko Shins ho* in Japanese), published in 1561 by the great Chinese general, Qi Jiguan (1522-87). There are some similarities between Qi’s thirty-two empty-handed self-defense illustrations and those that appear in the Okinawan Bubishi.

A classified document, it was available only to authorized military personnel, government bureaucrats, and others on a need-to-know basis. During the Qing dynasty, authorities banned it for fear of it falling into rebel hands and being used for anti-government activity.

OKINAWA’S BUBISHI

Okinawa’s Bubishi is an anthology of Chinese *gongfu*, its history, philosophy, and application. Focusing on the White Crane style from Yongchun village, Fujian Province, this compilation also addresses Shaolin Monk Fist *gongfu* and reveals its relationship to Okinawa’s civil fighting legacy of karate-do.

The contents of this anthology’s thirty-two articles include White Crane *gongfu* history, moral philosophy, advice on etiquette, comparisons of styles, defensive applications, herbal medicines, training mechanics, and Monk Fist Boxing. This may suggest that the Okinawan Bubishi was composed of several smaller books or portions of larger books. While some of this anthology is relatively easy to understand, much of it is not. Written in Classical Chinese, much of the Bubishi is, even at the best of times, perplexing. Many of the terms for the methods date back to a time all but forgotten. Other obstacles include Chinese ideograms that have been either modified since its initial writing or are no longer in use.

In addition, in order to maintain the ironclad ritual of secrecy within the martial art schools of old China, techniques were often described using names that disguised their actual meaning. As such, only those advocates actively pursuing the style were aware of the true meanings and applications of the techniques. A practice once widespread in China, this tradition, for the most part, was not handed down in Okinawa. Hence, these creative names (e.g., Guardian Closes the Gate) made technical explanations difficult to accurately decipher without knowing exactly what physical technique it represented. Contrary to popular belief, the Bubishi is not a manuscript easily understood by most Chinese or Japanese simply because they are able to read the ideograms. For the same reasons mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, most Chinese people, whether directly connected to the native fighting arts or not, would have little or no idea what such abstract descriptions mean. As for the Japanese, and Uchinanchu too, without the corresponding *furigana* (phonetic characters) to help clarify the meanings and usage of the Chinese ideograms, the essence of the Bubishi, like its origins, remains unclear.

There is also a surprisingly large portion of the text on the use of Chinese herbs and other medicinal remedies, which provides provocative insights into an aspect of training no longer fashionable in our day and age. Exceedingly brief and hampered by grammatical errors (resulting from being hand copied down through the ages), Articles 10, 11, 12, 19, 22, 30, and 31 prescribe various concoctions in a way that supposes the reader already understands the principles of herbal medicine. This has proven to be the most difficult section to translate, however, after years of arduous research I am now able to present the first unabridged direct translation of these entries in any language. I should note that another writer attempted to translate this section but in his haste gave up and rewrote it inserting modern remedies not related to what was in the actual Bubishi.

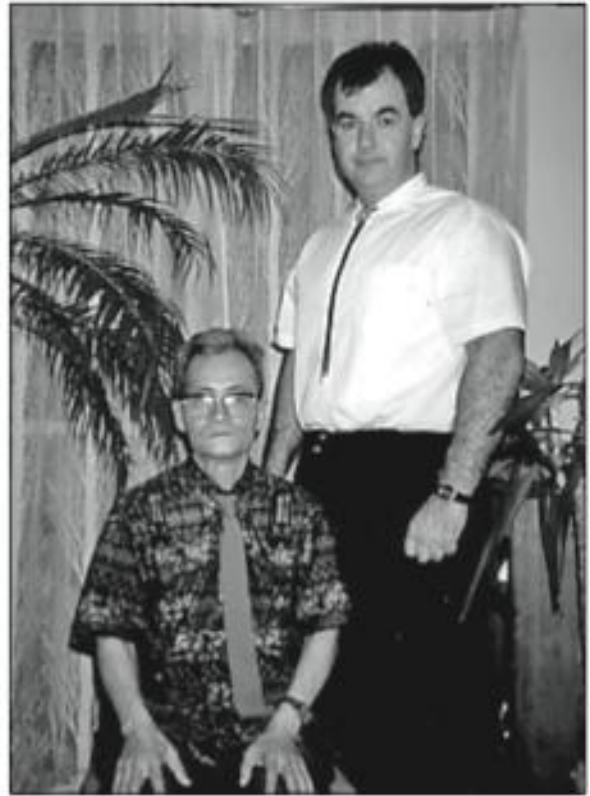
The Bubishi also includes a rather ambiguous explanation surrounding an even more obscure technique called the “poison-hand” or the “delayed death touch” (*dian xue* in Mandarin, *dim mak* in Cantonese). A science understood by very few, mastering *dian xue* requires remarkable dedication and may very well be the reason the Bubishi has remained such an obscure document for so long in spite of efforts to publicize it. These articles in the Bubishi do not describe how to render a potentially violent attacker unconscious with carefully pinpointed blows nor do these articles explain what to do if attacked. Rather, they systematically describe how to extinguish human life in very specific terms, by seizing, pressing, squeezing, or traumatizing specific vital points. These articles are presented here in their entirety.

At first I had some reservations about presenting this information as I was concerned that it could be misused. However, today, there are a number of books and video tapes on the market that describe the theories and applications of this science. Thus anyone interested in the principles of cavity strikes, artery attacks, blood flow theory, and the death touch, can study the material that is presently available. I trust that this knowledge will not be misused and that those individuals who undertake the time-consuming process of learning this art will be scrupulous and not experiment on unsuspecting victims or use it in anything other than a life-and-death struggle.

Although the exact details surrounding the origin of the Bubishi remain unclear, it is nevertheless a valuable historic treasure. Remaining unanswered, the questions surrounding its advent in Okinawa are not altogether beyond our reach. It is entirely possible to calculate, with some degree of certainty, that which we do not know by more closely analyzing that which we do know.

For example, if, in addition to the historical details previously presented, we were to more closely examine the surviving testimony surrounding karate’s early pioneers, we might discover who were most responsible for cultivating China’s civil fighting traditions in Okinawa. Even if we are unable to accurately determine the actual source from which the Bubishi materialized, we are at least able to identify the main characters associated with Okinawa’s civil fighting traditions. In so doing, we will have isolated the range of analysis through which future study may bring even more profound and enlightening discoveries.

However, those historical discoveries will not come easily. It is the opinion of this writer that much of what was originally brought to Okinawa from the Middle Kingdom either no longer exists, or, like so much of the *gongfu* in China, has been radically changed. In addition to the many major styles of southern *gongfu* that have affected Okinawa’s fighting traditions, who is to say how many minor schools have come and gone without a trace. It is virtually impossible to trace the evolution of these styles and schools. On behalf of the Fuzhou Wushu Association’s many eminent members, Li Yiduan maintains that an incalculable number of schools and styles (sometimes practiced by as few as a single family or even one person) have either vanished, been exported to a neighboring province, or have been consumed by other styles over the generations. With that in mind, I would now like to conclude my preliminary analysis by exploring the plausible sources from which the Bubishi may have surfaced in Okinawa.



1989 photo of White Crane Grandmaster Liu Songshan and Author, Patrick McCarthy

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