Karate in Taiwan and South Korea: A Tale of Two Postcolonial Societies

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Introduction

Taiwan and South Korea share a comparable history. Both experienced Japanese colonial rule, achieved dazzling economic development in the 1970s and 1980s, and democratized about the same time: in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In each country’s respective authoritarian regime, countless citizens were victims of entrenched state violence. Geopolitically, both nations were junior allies of the United States during the Cold War. Yet, when it comes to a generalized attitude toward their colonial past, the two nations appear to have vastly differing positions, with Taiwan largely considered ‘pro-Japanese’ and South Korea ‘anti-Japanese.’ This divergence is perhaps best symbolized in the fate of each country’s former Office of the Governor-General. In Taiwan, the building still serves as the Presidential Office and is a popular tourist attraction. In South Korea, the Japanese structure, which was perceived as a reminder of the painful and shameful colonial past, fell victim to the wrecking ball in 1995, on the eve of the 60th anniversary of liberation from Japanese imperial rule.

This article offers a cultural analysis of post-World War II (hereafter postwar) Taiwan and South Korea through the prism of Japanese martial arts, in particular that of Shōtōkan karate. A comparison of karate’s development in the two societies reveals a striking difference in how each coped with its colonial past, particularly in the formulation of national identity and national reconstruction: in Taiwan, karate remained rooted in its Japanese origins, whereas in South Korea, the martial art was transformed into taekwondo. These divergent reactions are a reflection of each country’s national sentiment toward Japan and the Japanese colonial legacy. Borrowing from Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), taekwondo is a new tradition that was ‘invented’ in the postwar period to replace a Japanese martial art.

Karate is a Japanese martial art characterized as ‘an empty-handed art of self-defense’ (Nakayama 1978: 11) with an emphasis on kicks, open-hand and closed-fist strikes, as well as defensive blocks and maneuvers (Haines 1968: 19). Karate has its roots in ‘Chinese boxing,’ introduced to Okinawa in the fourteenth century, and Japanese combat techniques that were likely brought to Okinawa in the thirteenth century (Funakoshi 1975: 38; Johnson 2012: 64). Although traced to
China and Japan, it was on the island of Okinawa that karate evolved into a distinctive martial art. Karate is practiced in the form of *kata*, a fixed combination of blocks, kicks, and strikes that emulate real-life combat scenarios, and *kumite*, a contest of controlled sparring between two karate practitioners (Tan 2004: 171).

The focus of this paper is the development of *Shōtōkan* karate—one of the four major karate schools—in Taiwan and South Korea. Funakoshi Gichin (船越義珍) (1868-1957), an Okinawan karate master who is often called the ‘father of modern karate,’ developed *Shōtōkan* karate after training in *Shōrei-ryū* and *Shōrin-ryū*, the two common styles of Okinawan karate of his time. He initially referred to his martial arts discipline simply as *karate* or *karate-dō*, but it later became known as *Shōtōkan* karate following the construction of his own martial arts hall in Tokyo in 1936 (Funakoshi 1975: 83-84). In the early twentieth century, as Okinawan karate spread to Japan proper, Funakoshi modified the art, adapting it to reflect the established martial arts culture in Japan. This appropriation transformed karate from an Okinawan to an institutionalized Japanese martial art.

Taekwondo – literally defined as ‘the way of kicking and punching’ – is a combative martial art that, like karate, emphasizes footwork patterns, kicking techniques, hand attacks, and arm blocks (Madis 2003: 185). Currently practised all over the world, taekwondo is a symbol of modern South Korean culture (Capener 1995: 1). Proclaimed as South Korea’s national sport in 1971, taekwondo serves as a source of tremendous pride for the South Korean people (Ahn *et al.* 2009: 1728), particularly since 2000, when it became an official Olympic sport. Taekwondo acts as a useful reminder of the connection between sport and nationalism (Swennen 2006: 73); following the Korean War, during a period of heightened South Korean nationalism, karate was deliberately transformed into taekwondo (Capener 1995: 2). This entailed a systematic elimination of taekwondo’s Japanese origins through the adoption of Korean terminology and language, the development of a unique system of training, and the creation of a taekwondo history (Salmon 2014). The Korean martial art, although formulated on the principles of karate, underwent a significant and deliberate alteration to camouflage its Japanese roots. This transformation of the martial art stands in contrast to its development in Taiwan, where the Japanese-ness of the martial art remained.

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1 The banning of weapons by the Ryukyu King Shoshin and later the Satsuma clan contributed to the development of the martial art (Okinawa Prefectural Government 2003).
2 Funakoshi himself said that he adopted the best qualities of both schools to form his unique style of karate (Funakoshi 1975: 38).
3 Funakoshi’s students named the hall ‘Shōtō,’ which was his pen name. In Japanese, *Shōtō* is the movement of pine needles as the wind blows or, as Funakoshi defined it, ‘pine waves’ (Funakoshi 1975: 87).
4 Taekwondo is one of only two Asian martial arts (the other being judō) that are currently in the Olympics.
5 Despite its Japanese origins, taekwondo’s development, particularly its Olympic development, in the latter half of the twentieth century has resulted in a unique training and competition system that is more like a combative sport than a Japanese martial arts system (Capener 1995: 3; Madis 2003: 202).
How Karate Became Taekwondo: Karate’s Transformation in South Korea

‘Invented tradition’ is a particularly useful concept in providing a conceptual understanding of the transformation of karate in postwar South Korea. The term was introduced by Hobsbawm and Ranger, who defined it as ‘a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 1). In this way, traditions ‘which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented’ (1). Invented traditions, therefore, are ‘part of the fund of knowledge or the ideology of a nation’ that do not reflect ‘what has actually been preserved in popular memory, but what has been selected, written, pictured, popularized and institutionalized’ (13).

Figure 1: A poster at the entrance of a Korean language school in Kaohsiung, Taiwan: ‘Korea, where the spirit of taekwondo meets the art of life’ (Photo by Yoshihisa Amae).

The historical connection between karate and taekwondo begins with the Japanese colonial occupation of Korea (1910–1945). As it was with Taiwan during

6 It can be argued that karate is also an invented tradition of Japan (Chan 2000; Johnson 2012). Just as imperial Japan annexed Korea, it abolished the Ryukyu Kingdom by claiming the archipelago as its own territory in the late nineteenth century. In this process, karate, an Okinawan martial art, was transformed into a Japanese martial art by institutionalizing it with modern Japanese organizations and philosophy, borrowing from Zen Buddhism and Bushidō. Yet, unlike the case in South Korea, Japanese karate never hid nor denied its Okinawan and Chinese roots.
the colonial period, numerous Koreans received advanced study opportunities in
Japanese high schools or universities. While in Japan, some students took part in
karate training and, after the end of World War II, introduced karate to South Korea
(Madis 2003: 196). They established karate dōjōs (or training halls) where Korean
instructors openly promoted their art as ‘Japanese karate’ (Capener 1995: 6;
Madis 2003: 196). Importantly, as Eric Madis states, ‘at the time, Japanese
training was respected within the Korean martial arts community; consequently,
there was no need or desire to conceal it’ (Madis 2003: 196). In fact, the
establishment of the Korean Kongsodoo Association by leaders of South Korean
karate organizations during the Korean War demonstrates that there was initially
no major stigma attached to the Japanese martial art (Madis 2003: 196). However,
Steven Capener (1995: 6) shows that South Korean political leaders exploited anti-
Japanese attitudes in the post-Korean War period as a tool for intensifying
domestic nationalism. Widespread resentment of Japan and intense Korean
nationalism at this time meant that Koreans were unwilling to participate in a
Japanese martial art (Capener 1995: 2). Indeed, karate’s Japanese-ness ‘did not
sit well with a people who harbored sour memories of harsh colonial rule’ (Salmon
2013). There were nationalistic and political motivations to transform karate into a
therefore underwent a transformation of its Japanese origins and was (re)invented
as a uniquely Korean cultural production that had continuously existed throughout
Korean history (Capener 1995: 2). The post-Korean War transformation of karate had a number of elements. The
the new and non-Japanese name of taekwondo was chosen in 1959 by
representatives of South Korea’s major karate organizations, which joined the
newly established Korean Taekwondo Association (Madis 2003: 197; Capener
1995: 6). Additionally, in the 1960s the different karate schools operating in South
Korea unified into one style with a single system of techniques and training
methods (Madis 2003: 202). With this came the invention of a historical narrative,
in which taekwondo was ‘popularized as a unique product of Korean culture,
continuously extant in Korean history’ (Capener 1995: 1). According to this
narrative, taekwondo evolved from an ancient Korean kicking game called
taekyon (Madis 2003: 185), or other ancient Korean martial arts like sunbae and
subak (Ahn et al. 2009: 1724). Nowhere are the constructed historical traditions of

7 There were five major karate schools in the early postwar years, including Chungdohwe,
8 In fact, as Sang Mi Park argues, the exclusion of ‘Japanese-ness’ from Korean public
discourse had been a central pillar of post-liberation Korean nationalism (Park 2010: 72).
9 Even with the ‘Koreanization’ of karate, several similarities still connect taekwondo to its
karate roots, including the use of white uniforms, a system of colored belts and degrees of
black belts to rank the progress of students, kata, training methods and basic techniques,
and the philosophical influence of ‘dō’ (Madis 2003: 202). In addition, taekwondo training
techniques follow karate practices (Kennedy, pers. corr. 13 November 2013).
10 Madis argues that taekyon’s influences on taekwondo are ‘non-existent’ (Madis 2003:
198). Instead, he makes the case that taekwondo should be considered a postwar invention
with roots in Shōtōkan and Shitō-ryū karate (Madis 2003: 185; see also Ahn et al. 2009:
1725).
taekwondo more evident than on the websites of the Korean Taekwondo Association (KTA) and the World Taekwondo Federation (WTF). Both awkwardly perpetuate this constructed narrative of the ancient traditions of taekwondo. The KTA website goes so far as to suggest that even karate has its roots in the ancient Korean martial arts: ‘It may be concluded that the Japanese Karate [sic], in turn, derives from taekyon or subak, the primitive form of Taekwondo’ (KTA Website).

Still, South Koreans do indeed practice karate. Korean karate practitioners, however, downplay, if not flatly deny, the Japanese origin of the martial art. The Korea Karatedō Federation (KKF) website, for example, claims that karate first evolved in ancient India and later arrived in Korea via China during the Tang dynasty (618–907AD). It suggests that karate is not Japanese, but only a martial art popularized around the world by ‘quick-witted’ Japanese (KKF Website). Interestingly, a similar narrative has formed in South Korea regarding kendo, a Japanese martial art often referred to as Japanese fencing. Japan introduced kendo (or kumdo as it is known in South Korea) to Korea during the colonial period. In fact, there are no significant differences between Japanese kendo and Korean kumdo. As Myke Cole notes (Cole 2002), the two ‘save for a few cosmetic differences, are completely identical.’ Yet, some Korean kumdo practitioners dispute the Japanese origins of the martial art. They take a revisionist stance, insisting that the sport originated not in Japan, but in seventh century Korea (Cole 2002).

The repetition of a constructed historical narrative demonstrated by taekwondo organizations accords with Hobsbawm and Ranger’s argument that formalizing and ritualizing a connection to the past through repeated assertion is necessary to further the legitimacy of the invented tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 4). In other words, while some asserted traditions are ‘novel,’ they maintain the illusion of being ancient through continuous repetition of the assertion. In South Korea, the repetition of taekwondo’s invented connection to indigenous Korean heritage has succeeded not only in obscuring taekwondo’s Japanese origin, but has also deeply entrenched this narrative in South Korean society (Madis 2003: 202).


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Numerous popular culture references also demonstrate the ritualization of taekwondo. One example is Robot Taekwon V, a popular Korean animation in the 1970s, in which a taekwondo champion named Kim Hoon pilots a robot and fights enemies using taekwondo skills (Figures 2 and 3). Robot Taekwon V was the first robot animation in South Korea. In recent years, the robot has been resurrected as a new national icon and even appeared in a TV commercial in 2005 as a protector of Tokdo/Takeshima, a disputed island between South Korea and Japan.

Karate’s Development in Taiwan

First introduced to Taiwan by Okinawans in the 1920s, karate was known as a ‘Ryūkyū martial art.’ In 1926, Kyan Chōtoku (喜屋武朝徳) (1870–1945), a karate master, visited the island to demonstrate the martial art in Taipei and other locations. According to colonial newspaper reports, crowds everywhere were amused with the ‘mystic, foreign art’ (Taiwan Nichi Nichi Sinpō 1926). Other Okinawan karate masters also visited the island throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

The first Shōtōkan karate appearance in Taiwan was on 31 March 1940, when two Japanese students from the Waseda University karate club demonstrated the martial art in Taipei (Taiwan Nichi Nichi Sinpō 1940a). Invited by the Waseda University alumni organization, the students were on a short mission to promote the Japanese martial art throughout the colony. As was the case with karate demonstrations in previous decades, huge crowds welcomed the Waseda University students wherever they performed. One major difference, however, was that Japanese militarism in the 1930s resulted in karate’s transformation from a mysterious Ryūkyūan martial art into a tool for promoting the ‘Japanese spirit.’ This sentiment is evident in the comments of the karate students: ‘Karate originated in Okinawa but is now a martial art of the Empire of Japan […]. We are students, but also subjects of the Empire of Japan. We promise to practice karate seriously to make ourselves useful to the nation (Taiwan Nichi Nichi Sinpō 1940b).’ During the colonial period, karate, unlike jūdō and kendō, was only demonstrated by Okinawan visitors or practised privately by Okinawan residents in Taiwan, and thus was not practiced by Taiwanese or Japanese residents of the island.

After the chaos of war and the turbulence of the postwar period, karate returned to Taiwan in the mid-1960s thanks to Asai Tetsuhiko (浅井 哲彦), a Shōtōkan

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12 It is noteworthy that the cartoon was accused of plagiarizing from a popular Japanese animation.
13 The demonstration was a fundraising event for the Japanese Christian Church of Pingdong.
14 Karate’s popularity in Japan began in the 1920s with the story of Motobu Chōki (本部朝基), a karate practitioner who defeated a foreign boxer with just one strike. This popularity carried over to the colony of Taiwan.
15 Ueda Masatoshi, one of the two students, was killed in battle during the Second World War.
karate instructor and Japanese karate champion. Although Japanese karate elders were in fact enacting a plan to spread karate overseas in the 1960s, Asai’s connection to Taiwan was more personal than it was strategic: in 1961 he met and later married Chen Hui-zhu (陳惠珠), a Taiwanese actress who was working for a film company in Tokyo. It was because of Chen’s urging that Asai agreed to visit Taiwan.

Asai was no ordinary instructor: while attending Takushoku University he joined the school’s karate club, where he studied under the tutelage of karate legend Nakayama Masatoshi (中山正敏) (Chen 2013). Asai and Nakayama – who became Chief Instructor of the Japan Karate Association (JKA) in 1958 – forged a lifelong bond in these early years of Asai’s karate development (Chen Hui-zhu, interview).

In 1965, he began teaching karate beyond the shores of Japan, travelling the world to aid in the development and popularization of the martial art (Chen 2013).

Asai visited Taiwan for the first time in 1965, while on route to Hawaii for his first overseas karate assignment. His visit was eagerly anticipated by Chen Hui-zhu’s older brother, Chen Hong-zong (陳宏宗) – a practitioner of White Crane gongfu (白鶴拳) who would later become Asai’s top disciple in Taiwan. According to Chen Hui-zhu

When Master Asai finally arrived in Taichung City, the students, learning karate for the first time, practiced feverishly. The exchange of martial art techniques continued well into the night every day. [...] The demonstration of kumite with Mr Chen caused a loud racket from other students. I feared that they were jeering Master Asai and starting a riot, but in fact it was the opposite, they were blushed with excitement.

(Chen 2013)

Chen Hong-zong and his White Crane students practiced under Asai every day before and after work for one month. After teaching them the basics, Asai left for Hawaii, promising to return to Taiwan when he completed his assignment. After Asai’s departure, in 1965, Chen not only practiced karate every day with his students, but he also took photos of their techniques and mailed them to Hawaii to have Asai correct them and answer their questions. This ‘distance learning’ continued until Asai returned (Figures 4 and 5).

Upon Asai’s return to Taiwan in 1969, karate spread like wildfire. Based in Taichung, Asai, Chen Hui-zhu, and Chen Hong-zong travelled around the island demonstrating and teaching karate (Figure 6). During this early period of karate’s popularization, Asai opened ten dōjōs on the island to train karate instructors. The period between 1969 and 1973 can be considered karate’s ‘golden years’ in Taiwan. Karate committees were formed around the island to organize competitions and manage other karate-related affairs. By the early 1970s, karate had become popular on the island with as many as 100 students in a single class, while competitions and demonstrations attracted hundreds, and at times thousands, of spectators. In March of 1973, the Taiwanese karate community established the

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16 In 1961, Asai won the kumite championship at the All-Japan Karate Championships – the event where he met Chen Hui-zhu; in 1963, he won the kata championship (interview with Andre Bertel).
Chinese Taipei Karate-do Federation. Asai also arranged for nine Japanese karate coaches to teach the martial art in locations throughout Taiwan. According to Chen Hui-zhu, 80% of Taiwan's current karate practitioners are in one form or another disciples of Asai or the teachers he trained (interview with Chen Hui-zhu). For this reason, Asai is widely considered the father of karate in Taiwan.

Asai’s success invited unwanted trouble and a power-struggle in the Taiwanese karate community. Accused of being ‘pro-communist’ and of using the karate association to recruit Taiwanese youth for the Chinese Communist Party – accusations later proven to be untrue – Asai saw his students depart and his reputation tarnished (Asai 2013). He therefore departed the island in 1973,
returning only a few times before his death in 2006. After his unceremonious departure from Taiwan, Asai continued to spread karate worldwide by teaching the art in over 70 countries (Asai 2013).

From its onset, the practice of karate in Taiwan has followed guidelines established in Japan; any changes to karate techniques or training methods are consistent with changes made in Japan (interview with Xiao Sheng-ji). The clear link between karate in Taiwan and karate in Japan is exemplified by the five precepts (空手道會員信條), or dojō kun, that are recited by the entire class at the end of each training session. The precepts, originally composed by Funakoshi Gichin, represent the core principles of karate. Numerous visits to Taiwan by prominent Japanese karate instructors in order to teach the martial art also demonstrate the link between karate in Taiwan and Japan. For instance, Nakayama Masatoshi, invited by Asai Tetsuhiko and Chen Hui-zhu, visited Taiwan to demonstrate and teach karate in 1971 (interview with Chen Hui-zhu) and Japanese karate master Kanazawa Hirokazu (金澤弘和), founder of the Shōtōkan Karate-do International Federation (SKIF), visited Taiwan in 1983 (interview with Wang Bo-zheng). In addition, Japanese and Taiwanese karate organizations maintain cooperative relationships – in fact, bi-national links are common, as are joint karate exchanges and seminars (interviews with Xiao Sheng-ji and Ceng Yan-jia). Instructor training, guidebooks, and instructional DVDs provide an added protection that guarantees the accurate dissemination of the basic karate movements and kata. It is perhaps inevitable that some minor differences in teaching methods or slight variation of kata techniques will still occur, but such variances do not reflect a purposeful split from karate’s Japanese origins (interview with Xiao Sheng-ji). Instead, these differences usually mirror the particular styles of individual coaches or generational changes between older and younger instructors. Unlike in South Korea, where the divergent karate disciplines were unified under the taekwondo brand, all the major karate disciplines practiced in Taiwan operate independently of each other and mirror their Japanese origins (interview with Xiao Sheng-ji).

Taiwan, under the banner ‘Chinese Taipei,’ is a member of the World Karate Federation (WKF), an international regulatory body founded in 1970 with the aim of ‘promoting, organizing, regulating and popularizing’ the major styles of karate. The structure of tournaments and competitions in Taiwan, including the guidelines and principles of referees and judges, as well as kata and kumite competition rules and regulations, follow standards established by the WKF (interviews with Xiao Hui-zheng and Xiao Sheng-ji). Membership in the WKF ensures adherence to the strict standards and norms of international karate competitions. Taiwan is also a

17 In 2006, Asai returned to Taiwan to reunite with his students, with whom he celebrated his birthday. It turned out to be his last visit to Taiwan as he passed away in August of that year.
18 The English translation of the dojō kun is as follows: (1) Strive for the perfection of character; (2) Defend the paths of truth; (3) Foster the spirit of effort; (4) Honor the principles of etiquette; and (5) Guard against impetuous behavior.
19 South Korea (the Republic of Korea) is also a member of the WKF.
member of the Asian Karate-do Federation (AKF), a subsidiary of the WKF, which represents ‘sport karate’ in Asia and organizes several regional karate tournaments, such as the bi-annual Asian Karate-do Championships.\(^{21}\)

The only notable departure from karate in Taiwan as it is practiced in Japan has been the gradual move away from using the Japanese language for certain karate terminology that is used to teach the martial art – that is, the language of stances, blocks, punches, strikes, kicks, and some *kata*. When Asai Tetsuhiko, as well as other Japanese coaches, first introduced karate in Taiwan, Japanese was the language of karate terminology, but this has evolved to include a hybrid of the Japanese and Chinese languages (interview with Xiao Hui-zheng). In general, the names of beginner *kata* use Chinese pronunciation while more advanced *kata* use Japanese pronunciation. The names of specific karate movements – such as cat stance (貓足立), upper block (上擋), front kick (前踢), or hand sword (手刀) – are usually taught with their Chinese pronunciations. However, some Taiwanese karate coaches do incorporate the Japanese pronunciation of this terminology into their karate instruction. Also, to pass the coaching examination, all coaches are required to know both the Chinese and Japanese pronunciations (interview with Xiao Sheng-ji). Japanese is also the language used for karate tournament terminology, particularly the language used by referees and judges (interviews with Xiao Hui-zheng and Lin Wen-shou). A first-generation karate practitioner, Xiao Hui-zheng (蕭輝政), explained (interview) that the increased use of Chinese for karate terminology ‘reflects limited Japanese language proficiency among the younger generations of karate practitioners.’ Yet, the continued use of the Japanese language for formal elements of karate, such as tournaments and instructor training, demonstrates strong ties to the traditional Japanese roots of the martial art.

**Karate and Chinese Cultural Nationalism**

The primary focus of the Nationalist government after its takeover of Taiwan in 1945 was the ‘cultural reconfiguration’ of the island’s people (Huang 2006: 715). Given that the Nationalist government considered the Taiwanese to have a questionable sense of national identity, there arose a need to eradicate Japanese cultural influences and eliminate patterns of ‘enslavement,’ while, at the same time, emphasize Chinese national consciousness and formulate a Chinese identity (Huang 2006: 715). One of the first steps in the Nationalist government’s efforts to eliminate Japanese influences in Taiwan – commonly known as ‘de-Japanization’ – included changing names of streets and towns, and destroying Japanese cultural symbols and Shinto shrines in key public spaces (Sugano 2011: 39, 43).\(^{22}\) The Nationalist government’s ‘de-Japanization’ also included a major reorientation of national culture, a key component of which was the promotion of a new national language policy (Huang 2006: 713; Hsiau 2000: 126). In 1946, as

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\(^{22}\) The policy of de-Japanization began immediately after retrocession and intensified briefly around 1972, likely as a reaction to Japan’s switching of diplomatic relations to the People’s Republic of China.
part of this new language policy, the newly installed Taiwanese provincial administration began phasing out the use of Japanese, enforced a Mandarin-only policy in the school curricula, and banned sections in Chinese newspapers and magazines that had provided Japanese language articles (Hsiau 2000: 55). The Nationalist government also banned judō and kendo, Japanese martial arts brought to the island during the colonial period (Chen 2008: 163). Although karate was never banned, the political atmosphere in the early postwar period, particularly in the wake of the '2-28 Incident,' intimidated karate practitioners from overtly taking part in Japanese cultural activities. For example, one karate elder, a seasoned instructor born in 1932 named Lin Wen-shou (林文授), switched from studying karate in Japan to White Crane gongfu upon his return to Taiwan in 1947 (interview).

The early postwar era in Taiwan is a period of ‘sudden discontinuities,’ where the Nationalist government’s promotion of specific Chinese values and culture in the education system, as well as maintaining indirect control of culture in the mass media and the arts, largely resulted in the removal of Japanese cultural influences and promoted Chinese traditional culture (Winckler 1994: 29).

Karate’s ‘return’ to Taiwan appears to stand in marked contrast to the Nationalist government’s hegemonic cultural policies in the early postwar years (Chun 1996). In 1965, the Nationalist government was in the process of further reshaping Taiwan through an intense Chinese cultural nationalism, commonly known as the Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement (1966–1976). Yet, karate’s introduction at this time provides evidence of the shifting political atmosphere that had occurred in Taiwan in the postwar years, and consequently shows that the commonly held view that the Nationalist government was ‘anti-Japanese’ may in fact be exaggerated. In other words, the policy of de-Japanization was not a permanent fixture of the postwar political climate, which therefore allowed the introduction of not only Japanese martial arts, but also other Japanese cultural productions. This point is echoed by a number of first-generation karate practitioners: Wang Bozheng (王博正), for instance, states that the ‘Nationalist government did not prevent karate practitioners from studying the martial art’ (interview), while Lin Wen-shou asserts that, ‘By the 1960s there was no hatred of the Japanese; the Nationalist Party did not treat Japanese badly, nor did they attempt to influence the development of karate […]. Chiang Kai-shek urged magnanimity toward the defeated Japanese’ (interview). Similarly, Xiao Hui-zheng’s view is that ‘Even though karate first arrived during the martial law period, the Nationalist Party did not care about martial arts. Taiwan in the 1960s was not the same as Taiwan at the end of the war; a lot of time had passed’ (interview). Additionally, Chen Hui-zhu

23 In spite of the ban, the martial arts did continue to be practiced in private locations as an underground activity. The prohibition of kendō continued until 1958 (Chen 2008: 163). The ban on judō was lifted in 1952; in 1956, the police began providing police officers with self-defense training in judō (Chen 2008: 164).

24 Native Taiwanese elites, who had received higher education in Japan, were systematically and deliberately wiped out, while others were randomly shot (Kerr 1966: 297-307). Between 18,000 and 28,000 people were killed in this massacre. The Nationalist government blamed the deaths on Communists and Taiwanese who were ‘poisoned by Japanese thoughts’ (He 2006: 245).
recalls some examples of corrupt officials seeking bribes, but beyond these ‘shameful tactics’ she maintains that, ‘the government generally had no issue with a Japanese martial art in the 1960s’ (interview). In point of fact, soon after karate’s introduction in 1965, the martial art was incorporated into the national sporting narrative of the Republic of China (ROC), a fact demonstrated by its inclusion in several state-sanctioned national and international sporting competitions – including the first ‘ROC–Japan Friendship Tournament’ in 1969, the ‘Taiwan Regional Games’ (全 國 運 動 會) in 1976, and the ‘Third Asian-Pacific Karate-do Championships’ (第三屆亞洲及太平洋區空手道錦標賽) in December of 1978.25

**Karate and Colonial Nostalgia**

Taiwanese in the postwar period harbored good feelings toward the Japanese. The reason for this postcolonial attachment may be a lasting legacy of the colonial period; in particular, modernization of the island under Japanese rule (Gold 1986: 45-46; Roy 2003: 54). However, another reason, as some scholars suggest, was the brutal reality of the postwar period and the failings of the Nationalist government. To many Taiwanese people, Sinicization was colonization in another form, through which Chinese Mainlanders replaced the Japanese as the privileged class. After two years of Chinese rule, the island economy plummeted, causing major inflation and high unemployment, the public health system was paralyzed, and the crime rate was soaring. Native Taiwanese were quickly disillusioned with what the government propagated as ‘the glorious restoration (to the Fatherland),’ and frustrated by government corruption. Melissa Brown argues that in postwar Taiwan, most Taiwanese suffered more severe oppression, discrimination, and economic hardship than during the Japanese colonial era, which therefore fostered ‘colonial nostalgia’ (Brown 2010: 468). While in the postwar years, the Nationalist government referred to Japanese influence as ‘enslavement,’ the native Taiwanese viewed the lifestyle adopted and developed under Japanese rule as civilized and enlightened.26

However, Monty Orr’s field research suggests that popularization of karate had little to do with colonial nostalgia. Conversations with some of the first generation of karate practitioners make clear that karate’s introduction, practice, and popularization throughout the island occurred because of the perceived superiority

25 This inclusion in the national sporting narrative meant that karate could be exploited for the purposes of Chinese nation building. Such a tactic had long been used by the Nationalist government in post-revolution China, where Chinese martial arts were linked to Chinese nationalism as a means to promote national pride (Kennedy and Guo 2005: 106). Brian Kennedy and Elizabeth Guo show that ‘physical health and martial spirit,’ which was rooted in the broader context of Chinese nationalism, had become a public policy strategy in early twentieth century China (Kennedy and Guo 2005: 106).

26 To this day, many Taiwanese consider the Nationalist government to be more destructive and less competent than Japanese colonial governments. The Taiwanese people who experienced Japanese rule refer to virtues such as honesty, hard work, and social responsibility as ‘nihon seishin’ or ‘the Japanese spirit.’ For example, see Cai (2001: 243-240).
of the martial art itself. Lin Wen-shou, for instance, studied karate because he considered Japanese athletics to be superior: ‘Chinese martial arts are good’, he said, ‘but Japanese martial arts are better’ (interview). Wang Bo-zheng asserts: ‘We studied karate not because it was Japanese, but because it was better; we did not care where it came from, we only cared that it was an effective martial art’ (interview). Xiao Hui-zheng similarly argues that ‘karate’s popularity had no connection to Japanese colonialism’ (interview). In the 1960s, before switching to karate many early karate practitioners previously studied other martial arts, including both Chinese and Japanese fighting techniques; at the time, as Xiao Hui-zheng explains, ‘there was the sense that karate was a new and better martial art’ (interview). Wang points out:

People knew it was a Japanese martial art but there was only a general understanding of its history. The Japanese instructors who came to Taiwan did not provide deep explanations of karate’s origins, mostly because they could not speak Chinese and, in the 1960s, the younger generation of Taiwanese could not speak Japanese. An understanding of the history of karate came later. (Interview with Wang)

Conclusion

Taiwan and South Korea developed with two different cultural trajectories in the postwar period. In postwar South Korea, the Japanese martial art of karate underwent a significant conversion into taekwondo. Taekwondo is therefore not only a recent invention, masked as an ancient form of a traditional Korean martial art, but also a martial art with its origins in Japanese karate. This ‘invented tradition’ reveals the uncompromising anti-Japanese perspective – a consequence of Japanese colonialism – held by the South Korean population. Karate’s metamorphosis into taekwondo also demonstrates South Korea’s impulse to construct a ‘pure’ Korean culture and identity. The sport’s invented historical narrative and consolidation as the country’s national sport show how taekwondo has become an indispensable cornerstone of South Korean nationalism.

By comparison, since its introduction in the 1960s, karate in Taiwan has maintained its Japanese roots, has been taught and disseminated by Japanese instructors, and has developed in parallel with Japanese karate organizations. This occurred even in the face of Nationalist government hegemonic cultural policies that attempted to eradicate Japanese influences on the island. Unlike South Korea, Taiwan – imagined as either a province of China or an independent nation – did not invent a new martial art tradition to construct and consolidate a national identity. The Taiwanese acceptance of a Japanese martial art is in itself not unique; karate is a common martial art practiced in hundreds of countries where it has not undergone significant alterations. It is, however, Taiwan’s colonial past, which it shares with South Korea, that makes the story of karate in Taiwan most intriguing: South Korea has remained hostile to its former colonizer, while Taiwan holds a sympathetic feeling for Japan. Karate, as examined in this article, is the living testimony of such divergence.
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**Interviews**

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Ceng Yan-jia
Taichung, 2 April 2014

Chen Hui-zhu
Taichung, 5 June 2014

Lin Wen-shou
Taichung, 28 May 2014

Wang Bo-zheng
Taichung, 28 March 2014

Xiao Hui-zheng
Taichung, 27 March 2014

Xiao Sheng-ji
Taichung, via Skype, May 11 2014

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