



*Bubishi*





# THE BIBLE OF KARATE

## *Bubishi*



Translated with commentary by  
**PATRICK McCARTHY**



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In this text I have opted to use the pinyin romanization system for all Chinese words. As such, kung fu is *gongfu*, *ch'i* is *qi*, *ch'uan fa* is *quan fa*, etc. I have also elected to refer to the Chinese unarmed civil fighting traditions using the popular Cantonese term *gongfu* rather than *quan fa*, *wushu*, or *kuoshu*. Although *gongfu* is a general term meaning “hard work” or a “work out” that does not specifically refer to unarmed civil fighting traditions, I felt its common use justified my using it in this text.

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## ◆ Acknowledgments ◆

The voluminous nature of my research has brought me into contact with virtually hundreds of people over the years. I would especially like to acknowledge the following people:

In America, I would like to thank my teacher Richard Kim, *Hanshi* of the Dai Nippon Butokukai. Through Mr. Kim's continued efforts, patience, and perseverance, I ultimately came to perceive that which lies beyond the physical boundaries of karate-do. Furthermore, my thanks go out to Hunter (Chip) Armstrong of the International Hopology Society for his assistance during the early stages of this research. Thanks also to Ms. Gigi Oh and Marian Castinado at *Budo Dojo* magazine, Michael DeMarco at the *Journal of Asian Martial Arts*, Wayne Muromoto at *Furyu* magazine, and Michael De Pasquale of *Karate International* magazine for publicizing my research.

In Taiwan, I am deeply grateful to Liu Songshan *Shifu* for sharing his "family treasure" with me through the *Shaolin Bronze Man Book (Shaolin Tong Ren Bu)*.

In China, I am very grateful to U Yiduan from the Fuzhou Wushu Association who, at my request, was able to gather several herb experts and *gongfu* masters to study and help translate the *Bubishi*. Resolving many of the grammatical errors in the *Bubishi*, Mr. Li's immeasurable contribution and support continue to be of enormous benefit to my research. I would also like to thank Col. Whitehead for supplying a copy of *The Secrets of Wudang Boxing*. I am also indebted to Xie Wenlian, a White Crane *gongfu* master and great-grandson of Ryuru Ko, for sharing so much of his knowledge with me.

In Japan, I am grateful to the following: Konishi Takehiro *Sensei* of the Ryobukai, who provided me with an original copy of Mabuni Kenwa's *Bubishi*; Ohtsuka Tadahiko *Shihan*, author of the Japanese translation of the *Bubishi* and a myriad of other related research projects, whose extensive analysis and deep knowledge of the *Bubishi* have had a profound effect upon my understanding of this obscure treatise; my friends, Fred Mende, John Wong, and Mitchell Ninomiya for their continuous support; Dr. Iokibei Tsutomu, an expert in the Chinese healing arts of acupuncture, herbal medicines, and *qigong*, who helped me decipher the mysteries surrounding the internal organs, their corresponding meridian channels, and vital points; and Alexander Kask for fundamentally revising and editing this presentation of the text.

In Okinawa, I am indebted to: Hokama Tetsuhiro *Shihan*, master of both Goju-ryu karate-do and *kobu-jutsu* and the curator of Okinawa's only museum dedicated to the preservation and promotion of its native civil fighting heritage, for his many contributions and support; Nagamine Shoshin *Soke* and his son Takayoshi *Sensei*, of Matsubayashi-ryu karate-do, for their considerable assistance; Professor Takayoshi Kuraiyoshi, for his help with my research; Richard Florence, who was responsible for more than just protecting against my grammatical inadequacies and edited the early drafts of this text; and Tokashi Iken, director of the Goju-ryu Tomari-te Karate-do Kyokai, for his continuing assistance.

In Canada, my thanks go out to my colleague and friend, Ken Low *Shifu*, president of the Canadian Chinese Kung Fu Association. Low *Shifu* helped me translate some of the *Bubishi's* most enigmatic Chinese ideograms.

In New Zealand, I would like to thank my friend and colleague John Finlayson, who has assisted my research in many ways and created the index for this book.

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In Australia, I would like to express my appreciation to Carole Rogers for granting permission to use the illustrations from her *Acupuncture Point Dynamics Manual* and to John Halpin, president of the Australian Karate Federation, for providing a copy of that text. I am also indebted to Kevin Brennan of *Australasian Fighting Arts* for his assistance in publicizing my research.

In England, I would like to thank Harry Cook, Graham Noble, and Terry O'Neill from *Fighting Arts International* magazine for their assistance in publicizing my research.

I would also like to thank my lovely wife, Yuriko, without whose endless patience, love, and support this work would never have been made possible.

Finally, it is unfortunate that I am unable to appropriately extend my personal gratitude to all the others who assisted with this research; nonetheless, their assistance was very much appreciated, and I hope that this publication may reflect favorably upon them.

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# ◆ Foreword ◆



by Li Yiduan

*Deputy Secretary General, All-China Athletic Federation, Fuzhou Branch  
Vice Chairman, Fuzhou Martial Arts Association*

With a breadth of unbelievable proportions and a history of unfathomable depth, the cultural heritage China had for centuries profoundly influenced those societies with which it once traded. Among the cultures most affected by the “Middle Kingdom” was the Ryukyu archipelago, and in particular, the people of Okinawa.

Based upon the remnants of an ancient grappling discipline cultivated in Okinawa during the time Tametomo (1139–70), and combined with the principles of Chinese *gongfu*, which had been continuously introduced to the Ryukyu archipelago from before recorded history, a number of indigenous self-defense methods gradually developed. Affected by the foreign cultures it once traded with, political reformation, and military subjugation, Okinawa’s self-defense disciplines continued to be fostered in an iron-clad ritual of secrecy up to and during the Meiji era (1868–1912).

With the period of secrecy over, after Japan made the transition from feudalism into democracy, Okinawa’s mainstream self-defense traditions were brought together so that they could be modernized and publicly introduced into the school system. As a result Ryukyu *kempo toudi-jutsu* (as the Chinese and Okinawan self-defense traditions came to be called before the advent of modern karate-do) took on both new characteristics and direction.

Molded by inflexible social ideologies and radically changed for group instruction and the competitive phenomenon in the school system, the original history, philosophy, and application of “karate-do” became overshadowed by commercial exploitation, which resulted in the myriad of eclectic interpretations we find today.

In recognizing the immense value of tracing historical lineages and establishing contact with original sources, foreign enthusiasts of karate-do from all over the world are now appearing in Fuzhou to research, study, and compare their art forms. Gaining new insights while discovering a deeper understanding of Okinawa’s civil fighting traditions, karate-do’s history, philosophy, and application are only now being unraveled.

One such man who made the distant journey in order to bridge the gap of obscurity is Mr. Patrick McCarthy. Although not the first, and surely not the last, his intense study and literary contributions are a testimony to his dedication toward gaining the deepest understanding of karate-do and its nonutilitarian

value. Hopefully, like those who have come before him, Mr. McCarthy's research will serve to bring students closer to finding that which is not always seen by the naked eye. In doing so, enthusiasts may well come to gain more than just a physical understanding of the discipline and its heritage.

Having hosted him in Fuzhou and traveled with him to Shanghai and the legendary Shaolin Temple, I have known Mr. McCarthy for many years and I can say without reservation that it is a pleasure to write this letter of introduction for his new edition. The *Bubishi* is an important cultural discovery and one that highlights the significance of Fuzhou's native fighting traditions. I sincerely hope that others may feel equally impelled to make similar journeys to experience the wonderful cultural heritage that has been preserved in the ancient Chinese fighting traditions.





by Richard Ki  
*Hanshi, 9th D*

From an early age, Patrick McCarthy has been a devout student of karate and *kobudo*. Maturing under my direction, he acquired a creative approach to learning, and came to realize the importance of balancing his physical training with metaphysical exploration. Moreover, through the precepts of karate-do, Mr. McCarthy has learned that empirical research and introspection are absolute necessities for one to discover that which lies beyond the immediate results of physical training.

Formerly one of Canada's most prominent karate teachers, Patrick McCarthy is second to none physically, which made him unparalleled in his reign as a competitive champion. Relocating to Japan where he became my personal representative, Patrick McCarthy's star is now shining on a new horizon. Of all the thousands of students that I have had over the years, Patrick McCarthy is by far the most talented.

The extensive research that he has undertaken over the years while studying the doctrines and history of karate-do makes him uniquely qualified to present this translation. Whatever he does, he does exceedingly well, and this book is a testament to his dedication and understanding of karate-do.

I highly recommend this translation of the *Bubishi* and hope that it will benefit those who seek the true essence of karate-do.





by Nagamine Shoshin

Hanshi, 10th Dan

World Shorin-ryu Karate-do Federation

Brought to Okinawa from Fuzhou long ago, the *Bubishi* is a secret Chinese book about *kempu* (*quanfa*). Describing the intricacies of Shaolin Temple Monk Fist Boxing and the principles of Fujian White Crane *gongfu*, the *Bubishi* is a historically important document whose secrets, until only just recently, have remained closely guarded by karate-do masters in Okinawa.

In addition to the copious amount of intriguing information contained within the pages of this profound document, the *Bubishi* also reveals the original application of orthodox *kata* and the moral precepts that govern the behavior of those who understand these secrets. Disclosing the principles of *tui* and *kyusho-jutsu* (art of attacking vulnerable points on the human body), the reader will come to understand that which has been kept secret for generations.

The *Bubishi* must be considered mandatory reading for all serious enthusiasts of true karate-do and is therefore an essential addition to one's personal library, a work to be deeply studied by both teacher and student alike. In so doing, the torch of true karate-do will continue to burn long into the future, lighting the arduous path upon which others may follow.

Responsible for the very first English translation of this remarkable text is a Canadian named Patrick McCarthy. A representative of the Kyoto Butokukai, Mr. McCarthy is one of the very few foreign experts of martial arts teaching karate-do here in Japan. A longtime resident of Japan and a regular visitor to Okinawa, Mr. McCarthy's karate research and literary contributions are known worldwide. Having first met him during the mid-1980s, I have come to know Mr. McCarthy as both a friendly and responsible person dedicated to the very principles upon which orthodox karate-do rests.

It was a pleasure to have been of some assistance to Mr. McCarthy during his lengthy research and meticulous analysis of the *Bubishi*, and I can think of no one better suited to introduce this important work to the Western world. As such, I am happy to write this introduction for Patrick McCarthy, and I hope that his efforts meet with great success.





by Ohtsuka Tadahiko

*Hanshi, 9th Dan*

*Gojukensha Karate-do Renmei*

Thanks to my collaborations with Yang Mingshi, Shimizu Mie *Sensei*, and Tokashiki Iken *Sensei*, I was able to research and publish, in Japanese, the *Bubishi*, a document that has been handed down from master to disciple in Okinawa for generations. Now, after his own extensive research, Patrick McCarthy has translated the *Bubishi* into English. Thanks to his efforts, one of karate's most important historical documents is now available to people in English. In this edition, Mr. McCarthy introduces some very provocative historical information, and has also taken the time to fully translate those articles pertaining to herbal remedies, a feat that I was unable to accomplish myself. I am delighted that this knowledge is being introduced as it is of enormous value.

Originally brushed in classical Chinese, using the Fujian dialect, this document was compiled more than two centuries ago. Passed down from master to disciple, the tradition of copying it by hand has unfortunately, resulted in grammatical inaccuracies, making its analysis all the more burdensome. As such, the impact of this knowledge will vary depending entirely upon how it is assimilated.

I know exactly how much research went into making this translation possible, and I deeply respect Mr. McCarthy's dedication. I sincerely hope that many people will read and benefit from this publication.







by Konishi Takehiro

Hanshi, 9th Dan

Shindo Jinen-ryu Japan Karate-do Ryobun

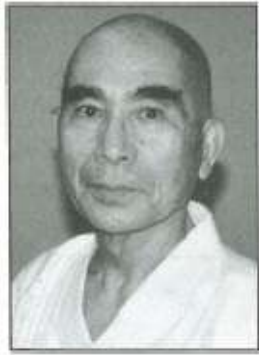
My father, Konishi Yasuhiro, was the only man to have ever learned from Motobu Choki, Funakoshi Gichin, Mabuni Kenwa, and Miyagi Chojun, the Okinawan masters who first pioneered karate on Japan's mainland during the 1920s and 1930s. He also enjoyed a close friendship with these men and was fortunate enough to receive a number of their original writings.

Lying dormant in my library, many of these original works have remained untouched for more than a half century. However, Mr. Patrick McCarthy, a *Kyoshi* of karate-do from the Dai Nippon Butokukai and a leading martial historian with impeccable credentials, has visited my home on many occasions to translate, analyze, and publish the unknown works of these men.

While translating the 1934 *Outline of Karate-do*, a handwritten manuscript left to my father by Miyagi Chojun, Mr. McCarthy also spent considerable time cross-referencing his analysis of the Fujian *Bubishi* with the original Okinawan version that was given to my father more than fifty years ago by Mabuni Kenwa, who had himself copied it directly from Itosu Anko's version.

I was delighted to have been able to be of some assistance to Mr. McCarthy's lengthy research. I am deeply impressed by his character and commitment to those values upon which true karate-do rests. I know of no one else who has dedicated as much time and effort to studying the *Bubishi* as Patrick McCarthy and I hope that his thorough analysis and remarkable translation are met with equal enthusiasm. Regarded as the bible of karate-do, Mr. McCarthy's English translation of the *Bubishi* must be considered essential reading for every serious follower of karate-do.





by Kinjo Hiroshi

Hanshi, 9th Dan

Zen Nihon Karate-do Rengokai

The publication of the *Bubishi* by the Charles E. Tuttle Company is truly a milestone in the history of modern karate-do. Culminating years of meticulous research, this presentation by Mr. Patrick McCarthy, one of the art's foremost authorities, represents an immeasurable addition towards understanding the magnitude of karate-do.

Mr. McCarthy was the very first person to present an English translation of this once-secret text. Even today, among the most experienced of karate enthusiasts, the *Bubishi* and its priceless contents remain virtually unknown.

With Mr. McCarthy's hallmark research and publication of the *Bubishi*, Western enthusiasts of karate-do the world over will finally be able to evaluate the gravity of the Oriental self-defense phenomenon. Methodically guiding its readers through the essential, but all too often unknown requirements of learning the genuine art form, this text must be considered mandatory reading by all enthusiasts of karate-do. The cultural heritage that this ancient text represents also serves as a unique bridge connecting Oriental thought to the Western mind.

Mr. Patrick McCarthy is one of the very few budo historians who has come to understand the true essence, history, and culture of karate-do. The ground-breaking research of this remarkable man has made him a trailblazer in the annals of modern karate-do. Like the *Kurofune* (black ships) that first introduced genuine Japanese culture to the outside world, so too is Patrick McCarthy the "Black Ship" of karate-do. I look forward to Mr. McCarthy's next publication, his further undertakings, and continued success.





by Hokama Tetsuhiko

Kyoshi, 8th Dan

International Karate-do Organization

As a colleague of Mr. Patrick McCarthy, I am delighted to be able to write this letter of congratulation for his splendid translation of the very perplexing and old document, the *Bubishi*.

There are many theories surrounding the origins of this mysterious but remarkable manual; however, all we can be really sure of is that the *Bubishi* is a document describing some unique fighting traditions of China and its associated principles. Consisting of thirty-two articles, the contents of the *Bubishi* are often quite difficult to understand. Until now there have been several people, including myself, who have conducted separate studies into various parts of the *Bubishi* but, because of its paradoxical nature, the analysis has remained incomplete.

While resolving the mysteries contained within the *Bubishi*, Mr. McCarthy has frequently visited both Okinawa and China. In addition to spending much time with me at the Okinawa Prefectural Karate-do Historical Material Museum, he vigorously researched a wide variety of plausible sources that brought us both into contact with many of the most respected authorities in karate-do and *kobudo*. Mr. McCarthy is well known in Okinawa, and all those who know him can tell you that his penchant for karate and *kobudo* is far beyond average. As a karateka, I am fascinated by Mr. McCarthy's physical prowess, scholarly pursuits, and friendly character. He is one of Japan's most senior-ranked foreign karate and *kobudo* teachers, and his extensive research has afforded him an international reputation. Mr. McCarthy's analysis of the *Bubishi* is by far his best work yet, and I hope that everyone will continue to support his ongoing efforts.

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# ◆ Introduction ◆

The work before you is the product of over ten years' research and travel. The arduous journey of investigative research started in my former home in Canada and extended to the outlying islands of the Ryukyu archipelago and mainland Asia. It was a most rewarding venture that brought me in contact with many of karate-do's most eminent authorities, had me exploring the antiquarian book shops in Tokyo's Kanda and Jimbocho districts, allowed me to establish a first-name relationship with the staff at the National Diet library, and even had me listening to the illuminating gossip in Okinawan sake taverns. My exploration included pilgrimages to Taiwan, Shanghai, the legendary Shaolin Temple, and China's southern coastal city of Fuzhou.

It was my honor to introduce the original English translation of the *Bubishi* to the Western world in 1987. Three years later, in 1990, after considerably more research, although still incomplete, I was able to present an even more comprehensive rendering of this obscure document. This was followed by another printing in 1992, due in large part to a growing interest in what I was researching and revealing.

Since that time, the *Bubishi* has continued to spark international curiosity and caused many supporters of the orthodox Okinawan fighting traditions to reevaluate their understanding of karate-do. I believe that the *Bubishi* has become a source of encouragement to the many enthusiasts who otherwise would remain discouraged by the competitive phenomenon and the aberration of commercial exploitation in the art. Looking to get beyond ego-related distractions and transcend the immediate results of physical training, the penetrating wisdom of the *Bubishi* provides an illuminating alternative point of view as to what the true meaning of karate-do is.

Most importantly, however, the original *Bubishi* has prompted several other researchers to embark upon independent analyses of their own, some of which have resulted in the publication of complementary works. Providing the entire karate community with an even broader understanding of this profound document, their outstanding efforts are applauded, and their valuable input a welcome contribution. Notwithstanding, the *Bubishi* remains such a penetrating study that the depth of its wisdom has yet to be fully measured or completely understood. As such, it is my most sincere wish that in this revised edition, the results of my latest research, might subsequently serve to bring the reader that much closer to comprehending the magnificent depth and meaning of this document.

Whereas in previous versions of the text I chose to present the articles in numerical order, I have now decided to organize them by subject matter in this book. In this way I hope that the reader will be able to more easily study the various subjects presented.

Any errors that may appear in this translation are mine alone. As such, this translation must be seen as an exposition of my personal research, and in that light, it must still be recognized as a continuing work. I sincerely hope that you will be as fascinated with the *Bubishi* as I continue to be. The *Bubishi* is like reading a translation of Musashi's *Book of Five Rings* or Sun Zi's *Art of War*, the more it is read, the more one gets from it.

—PATRICK McCARTHY

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**PART ONE**

# History and Philosophy



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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 *b* 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 not overshadowed by more base pursuits.

Disclosing the original means and methods of orthodox Chinese *gongfu* (also known as *quanfa* “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 in 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.

A significant portion of *Karate-do Kyohan* by Funakoshi Gichin (1868–1957) is taken directly from the *Bubishi*.<sup>1</sup> 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. 160) 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.”



Mabuni Kenwa.

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.

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.

### **Possible Origins of the Bubishi in China**

The *Bubishi* bears no author's name, date, or place of publication. Therefore, accurate details surrounding its origin are unavailable. It is presumed that the *Bubishi* was brought from Fuzhou, Okinawa sometime during the mid- to late-nineteenth century, but, by whom remains unknown. There are several hypotheses surrounding the advent of the *Bubishi* in Okinawa. Unfortunately, none can be corroborated. On the other hand, there is testimony describing the experiences of some well-known *Uchinanchu* (Okinawans) who traveled to the Middle Kingdom for the sole purpose of studying the fighting traditions.



Some insist that the *Bubishi* appeared in Okinawa by way of their teacher's teacher. Another theory suggests that the *Bubishi* surfaced independently from within the Chinese settlement in the Kuninko district of Naha. Yet another hypothesis maintains that the *Bubishi* is a collection of knowledge compiled over many years by *Uchinanchu* who studied in China and belonged to a secret fraternity. All of these assumptions seem perfectly plausible. However, when subjected to critical evaluation and given the lack of data presently available, these theories remain simply speculation.

It is possible that the exact reason for the *Bubishi* surfacing in Okinawa may be lost to antiquity forever. However, rather than support or oppose conjecture, it might be more fitting to simply appreciate the efforts of those adventurous stalwarts who sailed the turbulent waters between the two cultures to cultivate and perpetuate these ancient traditions. The ancient Chinese combative traditions cultivated by these *Uchinanchu* were the base on which modern karate-do and *kobu-jutsu* were established.

### ***The Two Bubishi***

Actually, there are two *Bubishi*, both of Chinese origin and from Fuzhou. One is a colossal treatise of



- [\*Empire in Black and Gold \(Shadows of the Apt, Book 1\) here\*](#)
- [\*\*Grace Hopper and the Invention of the Information Age book\*\*](#)
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