

# General Karate: A New Compromise Between Budo And Sport In Modern Western Society

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## Abstract

**Studi Purpose** Today, in the modern West, karate exists in two systematically different paradigms: Budo and Sport, which are in a state of constant competition for a place and influence in society. In recent years, there has been a tendency to shift the focus of Western society towards Sport, which poses real challenges to Japanese style Budo karate: 1) the threat of becoming a typical Western sport; 2) the threat of marginalization and loss of authenticity and features of the Eastern combat system.

**Method** The review and analytical study is a summary of the results of the author's previous research and is based on his many years of practical experience in both Budo and Olympic sports. The working hypothesis of the study is to determine the potential ability of the sport discipline of General Karate to become a new compromise between Budo and Sport and to be an effective means of protecting karate from modern challenges and strengthening the influence of authentic Japanese style karate in the West. The article is the presentation at the 13th International Conference IMACSSS, 14-16.10.2024, Malaysia. **Result and Discussion** The article provides evidence that Budo and Sport are fundamentally different social phenomena that cannot be evaluated solely in terms of sports competitions. The author uses a civilizational-historical approach and analyzes the structural construction of the Budo and Sport paradigms, respectively. **Conclusion** The author considers the compromises made by the East in promoting karate to the West and the assertion that General Karate can be a new compromise that meets the needs of Westerners in top-level competitions and, at the same time, does not require the style to change its own identity, abandon the traditional training strategy or make any concessions to its own philosophical principles.

**Keywords:** Budo paradigm; Sport paradigm; sports disciplines; local civilizations; McDojo

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, karate exists in two forms, each of which is a separate, self-sufficient and independent social phenomenon, which is structured in a specific paradigm different from the other.

The analysis of the real state of modern karate and trends of its development in Western society allows us to assert that these two forms of karate are the most systematic and structured and adapted to ensure the realization of the social mission of karate - education and development of a person using the means of Japanese and Okinawan combat systems:

1. Style karate in the Budo paradigm;
2. Sports karate in the Sport paradigm.

Each of them has a public demand and recognition, has

its own horizontal and vertical institutions and a wide range of supporters and, naturally, is able to create its own sports disciplines, the difference between which is determined by the specificity of the paradigms in which the system that formed the relevant discipline exists [16, 21].

The simultaneous existence of karate in two different karate paradigms in the global world is due to the fundamental systemic differences between them, which protect them from the erasure of specific features of styles and the imposition of the unification of the entire diversity of karate into a single unified structure through the absorption of traditional styles and schools by sport karate. Under the influence of such globalization pressure, the focus of Judo and Korean Taekwondo has shifted towards sports and, accordingly, a partial abandonment of authenticity.

In the author's opinion, it is important for karate in the Budo paradigm to preserve and emphasize its fundamental systemic differences from karate in the Sport paradigm. Blurring the clear line between Budo and Sport will pose real challenges to authentic style karate:

- 1) the threat of being absorbed and transformed into a typical Western sport;
- 2) the threat of marginalization and loss of features of a real combat system.

The guarantee of preserving the prospects for the successful development of style karate in modern Western society is the active actions of style institutions, both to protect their own authenticity and to develop advanced compromise models to offset the destructive impact of globalization processes.

The authors assume that karate, as a combat system in the Budo paradigm, was the first compromise model. The founders of Budo took into account the processes of modernization and westernization that swept Japan after the Meiji Reform of 1868-1889, and foresaw the consequences of civilizational influence on Eastern combat systems as they moved to the West. Therefore, on the basis of Japanese and Okinawan systems of real combat in the Bugei (or Bujutsu) paradigm, a new paradigm, Budo, was formed as a system of education designed for mass and accessibility, with elements understandable and attractive to the Western mentality, which became a kind of civilizational compromise and protection of the authenticity of Eastern combat systems and the philosophical and spiritual values of the East on which they were formed [16, 21]. Budo has pronounced signs of an invented tradition that met the requirements of the time and the demands of the society of the time [9]

An important challenge on the way of karate to the West

was: - the need for public recognition through sporting successes inherent in the Western mentality; - the traditions of agonism historically formed in ancient times; - the high popularity of the Olympic idea. Points of misunderstanding and confrontation between Olympic sports and Budo karate were inevitable. Although the creator of modern karate, Funakoshi Gichin, was an opponent of competitions [11, 13], his followers were forced to make another compromise, i.e. to hold sports competitions and create specialized institutions for this purpose [13, 20]. This led to the emergence of sports disciplines within the structure of Budo, laid the foundation for their ideological confrontation with Olympic sport, which in turn required new compromises.

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## 2. Materials and Methods

The analytical study is dedicated to solving the problem of preserving the authenticity of style karate in modern Western society:

Concretization of the recognition of karate in the paradigms of Budo and Sport as fundamentally different social phenomena, the assessment of which requires fundamentally different approaches;

Consideration of the hypothetical ability of the sport discipline of General Karate to become a new compromise that will balance the positions of Budo and Sport in the issue of karate competitions.

In the study, the author relies on his personal experience of practical activity within both Budo and Olympic sports, on a deep understanding of the structure, internal problems and features of each of the two paradigms, as well as on knowledge of the laws by which they function. The work also uses the systematized and integrated results of previous research by the author's team, Internet resources of various karate institutions, and scientific publications on the topic of the study.

The focus of the study is on: - civilizational factors and their role in the formation of the relevant karate paradigm; - fundamental differences between karate in the Budo and Sport paradigms, respectively; - cognitive dissonance among Budo supporters associated with sports competitions; - the potential of General Karate as a compromise between Budo and Sport.

**Table 1:** Comparison of basic characteristics of karate in the paradigm of Budo and Sport

	Budo paradigm	Sport paradigm
Civilization of origin	Japanese local	Western local
Social processes that influenced the paradigm formation	Modernization in the westernization of Japan	Globalization of the world

The main idea that shapes the paradigm	Education and human development	Identifying the best of the best
The dominant ideology	Bushido - the code of the samurai warrior	The Olympic Charter - the foundations of Olympic sport
Social mission	Organization of a system of long-term process of comprehensive spiritual and physical development of a person by means of karate	Creation of a system of training for the highest sports achievements in karate and the structure for their realization
Role of competition in the overall structure	Part of the overall process, controlling its progress through internal competitions	The highest goal
Marker of personal success	Achievement of the highest levels of mastery in a particular style of karate	The title of karate champion in the highest level competitions
Strategy of long-term training	Traditional strategy for a particular style based on Eastern philosophical concepts and principles	A modern strategy common to all combat sports
Characteristic of long-term training	Uniform systematic process with a gradual increase in complexity when moving to a higher level	The process is tied to participation in competitions, has a wave-like character and peaks in the achievement of the highest sports form
Mastering the technical arsenal of the style	In full and in all sections	Selectively, in accordance with the chosen sports specialization

Both forms of karate are complex multi-element structured systems that, when taken seriously professionally, objectively require their followers to be fully dedicated and turn karate into a way of life.

In addition, the growing competition between Budo and sports in some Western countries, such as Ukraine, gives rise to irreconcilable confrontation and the imposition of strict requirements that exclude the possibility of combining both, both for organizations and individuals. This is especially evident on the part of sports organizations that claim a monopoly in karate and demand that you refuse to be a member of a style federation as a condition for participation in their competitions [18].

Objective and subjective factors put a person or institution in front of an inevitable choice: Budo or Sport. This requirement is unacceptable for most style federations.

The traditional strategy of improvement is based on the principle of Kata in a broad sense, which is used in all spheres of life in Japan. The essence of the principle is that any social phenomenon has a certain practice-proven algorithm of sequential actions that cannot be violated. The transition to the next action is impossible without the perfect fulfillment of all the previous ones. Examples of Kata in the broadest sense are the tea ceremony, the karate belt system, and even the process of rice cultivation [2]. Mastering the technique follows the principle of Shingitai, which implies that each action from the style's arsenal must be brought to perfection by merging the spirit, body and technique into one [6, 12, 14]. There are many other traditional means of achieving perfection, but their effect

is delayed due to the long list of things to learn and the high requirements for quality and reliability. That is why it is difficult for Budo representatives to compete in the Olympic karate system, where an athlete chooses a separate part of the karate arsenal as a sports specialization and devotes all his time and efforts to it.

This is especially true for karate fans who have chosen the Budo way, but are members of a society that thinks in terms of Western mentality, in which the spirit of competition and the need for self-affirmation through success in sports play a significant role, and the idea of championships negates the value of a long process of self-improvement [17]. On the one hand, they understood and recognized the values of Budo as acceptable to them;

want to master some style of karate in full;

are committed to a long-term gradual path of self-improvement;

for them the goal of karate training is to achieve mastery; do not want to completely abandon Budo for the sake of sports competitions.

On the other hand, they face challenges:

The need for recognition of their achievements by a society that evaluates success through sports victories;

The desire to participate in large prestigious competitions to prove their skills;

The need to get rid of the inferiority complex due to information pressure that imposes a fashion for sport karate.

Such individuals feel like Einstein's allegorical fish, which is considered a failure because it is evaluated solely for its ability to climb trees. The inability to fully combine training in Budo and high-performance sports, as well as unequal opportunities in competition with professional highly specialized athletes, can provoke cognitive dissonance in them and lead to undesirable consequences for Budo:

The flow of people from Budo to Sport;

The emergence of the so-called McDojo

McDojo is a quite widespread marginal direction of karate development in the West recently, which appeared against the background of competition between Budo and Sport, due to the lack of an accessible description of the basic differences between them [1, 4]. This undermines the prestige of karate in general and harms Budo and Sport equally. McDojo - schools or clubs that do not actually practice classical Budo or high performance sports, but for commercial purposes mimic their strengths and offer, often simultaneously [19]:

Quick and easy certification for belts that are not backed by real skill;

Fake sporting achievements, when victories in competitions of dubious level are presented as successes of national or international importance

The working version of the study is the assertion that an effective means of overcoming the progressive shift of karate's focus towards globalized sports and protecting the authenticity of karate can be the sport discipline of General Karate, which can become a new compromise between Budo and Sport, which can provide an optimal balance between the traditional values of the East and the inherent Western mentality's need for public recognition through sports success [Malaysia]. General Karate

emerged in Europe as a single platform for competing all styles of karate on equal and fair terms, and from 1980 to 1998 it was the main discipline at the World Championships organized by WUKO/WKF. In 1993, the 101st session of the IOC recognized General Karate as a sport discipline that meets the conditions for inclusion in the Olympic Games program [10, 24].

To confirm the hypothesis, we analyzed the rules, regulations and results of competitions in General Karate in comparison with other sports disciplines also recognized by the IOC:

Traditional karate in the Budo paradigm, the rules of which are used by style karate organizations for their competitions;

Sports karate in the Sport paradigm, which was included in the program of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

The following indicators are included in the focus of consideration: the main goal and strategy of the competition; the target group of participants and the presence of specific sports management; the degree of remoteness of the rules from the authentic philosophy and logic of combat; the balance of Budo and sports in the structure of the training process.

### 3. Result

The results of comparing the status, strategy of long-term training process and rules of kata and kumite competitions in three sports disciplines are presented in Tables 2-3 [18].

In the author's opinion, General Karate makes it possible to establish a balance between the traditional structure of the training process and participation in prestigious sports competitions, which is confirmed by the following (Table 2):

as a sports discipline, General Karate is a transitional form between Traditional Karate (Budo) and Sports Karate (Olympic), i.e. it simultaneously contains structural elements characteristic of both;

official recognition by the IOC confirms the high sporting status of General Karate and puts it on a par with WKF Karate, which is included in the 2020 Olympic program as a version of Sport Karate;

3) competitions under the rules of General Karate were successfully used at the first competitions from the long list of regular World Championships held by the WKF.

4) There are world federations, the largest of which is the World Union of Karate Federations (WUKF), which hold regular mass world and European championships in General Karate and successfully compete with sports karate [27].

**Table 2:** Comparison of three IOC recognized sports disciplines of karate

	SPORTS DISCIPLINES		
	Budo Paradigm	Sports Paradigm	
	Traditional Karate	General Karate	Sports Karate
STATUS			
WUKO/WKF world championships	from 1970 (Tokyo) to 1977 - only Ipon-kumite	from 1980 (Madrid) to 1998 - Sanbon-	from 2000 (Munich) to the present only Shobu-kumite

		kumite and Ipon-kumite	
IOC recognition	1993 - 101st IOC session - official recognition of two sports disciplines of the single sport of karate		2016 - 129th IOC session - inclusion in the 2020 Olympic program
Regularity	Mostly irregular	Regular competition calendar	
Rules	Traditional for this style	Stable agreed unified rules	
Organization	Traditional competition formula	Modern sports management	
Admission of participants of different styles	Restricted: only representatives of a specific style	Free for representatives of any style on equal and fair terms	Restricted: only members of a sports federation. Style affiliation is leveled
LONG-TERM PREPARATION PROCESS			
Strategy	Systematic structured training in one of the styles, focused on belt certification, independent of the competition plan		Sports training subordinated to the competition plan
Character	Systematic training with a traditional structure according to the principle of Kata (in the broadest sense)		Targeted training for selected competitions
Specificity	Universal training: everyone is required to master all sections of the program: kihon, kata, kumite, self-defense, possibly kobudo. Participation in competitions in several sections..		Specialization in one section: kata or kumite.
COMPETITION MANAGEMENT			
Regularity	Mostly irregular	Regular competition calendar	
Rules	Traditional for this style	Stable agreed unified rules	
Organization	Traditional competition formula	Modern sports management	
Admission of participants of different styles	Restricted: only representatives of a specific style	Free for representatives of any style on equal and fair terms	Restricted: only members of a sports federation. Style affiliation is leveled

The study of the regulations and rules showed that General Karate: a) is able to guarantee equal and fair conditions for different styles, including small and newly created ones; b) does not require abandonment of style identity or traditional forms and strategies; c) is an effective means of comparing schools of the same style (kata categories for each style) and between styles (joint kumite); d) has a division of participants by skill (Dan or Kyu divisions). The compromise with Sport Karate is the formula of Sanbon-kumite and the use of modern sports methodology and management (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Comparison of the competition rules of the three IOC recognized sports disciplines of karate

Three IOC recognized sports disciplines of Karate		
Budo Paradigm	Sport Paradigm	
SPORTS DISCIPLINES		
Traditional Karate	General Karate	Sports Karate
KATA COMPETITION		

Formula and allowed kata	Internal competitions for a specific style. Only kata of this style are allowed	Separate competitions for each style. Kata of all schools or versions of one style are allowed	Joint competitions for everyone. Permitted kata from a single official list
Requirements for performance	Each style (school or version of one style) performs according to its own requirements or traditions		Unified requirements for all styles
Evaluation priorities	Realistic demonstration, understanding of Bunkai and adherence to the principle of Shingitai		Spectacular and beautiful performance
Divisions	By age	By age	By age
	By training level (Dan, kyu)	By style By training level (Dan, kyu)	
KUMITE COMPETITION			
Formula of the fight	Ipon-kumite - up to one effective attack	Sanbon-kumite - up to three effective attacks	Shobu-kumite - unlimited points
The strategy of the fight	Strategy close to the logic and strategy of a real fight		Game strategy according to certain rules
Evaluation priorities	Two levels of evaluation depending on the destructive potential of the attacking equipment		Three levels of evaluation depending on the area of attack
Divisions	By age	By age	By age
		By weight or height	By weight

The more active development of the sport discipline of General Karate provides Budo fans with the following opportunities:

compete with equal opponents without abandoning traditional training in the chosen style of karate;  
 compete according to the rules that preserve the strategy and logic of a real fight;  
 participate in high-level prestigious competitions with modern sports management;  
 compare the level of their skills with representatives of other styles;  
 for small and newly created styles to demonstrate their strength and effectiveness;  
 to expose fake McDojo styles and schools in the course of equal and fair competitions

The existence of real threats to classical Budo karate and its authenticity was agreed upon in personal communication and interviews by well-known practitioners of various karate styles. They also agreed that, with the necessary support from the institutions of style karate and the participation of their members in competitions under the rules of General Karate, they can help solve many of the problems of Budo in the modern West.

## 4. Conclusion

The two paradigms of karate existing in the modern world, Budo and Sport, are fundamentally different social phenomena. It is important to understand the difference between them and not to use only sports indicators for their comparison, since sport is not the exclusive focus of



Budo;

The sport discipline of General Karate has all the means to fully satisfy the sporting needs of Budo adherents, without requiring them to violate the strategy of a long-term traditional training process and deviate from the philosophy and principles of Budo;

General Karate can be an effective means of preserving the authenticity of style karate in the Budo paradigm, provided that the institutions of style karate and their leaders agree to implement such recommendations:

To create in the public consciousness a clear distinction between Budo and Sport as social phenomena with different missions in society, as well as between General Karate and Sport Karate as separate self-sufficient sports disciplines;

Actively explain the mission and content of Budo, as well as the specifics of General Karate, which will make it impossible to mimic their strengths and the brand as a whole;

Leaders of different styles to actively support participation in competitions of General Karate to satisfy sports ambitions and reduce the irreversible flow of their followers to sports

Coordinated actions of the style federations and institutions of the General Karate will be able to resist the process of globalization of karate and its transformation into a typical Western sport.

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