



Empty Handed I Entered the World: Great Okinawan Karate Masters Lost in 2012-2014

Christopher M. Clarke

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"Empty-handed I Entered the World" consists of brief biographies of more than a dozen senior Okinawan karate masters who have died between mid-2012 and mid-2014. Within the next few years, this entire cohort will be gone. Those who have passed from the scene run the gamut of styles and former teachers, including masters of various branches of Shorin-ryu, Goju-ryu, Uechi-ryu, Kempo, and Motobu-ryu. As these pre-War-trained masters die off, we are losing not only vital links to the past but a vast storehouse of knowledge. The challenge in the future for serious foreign martial artists training under top-notch instructors in their home countries will be to identify the best of the best in Okinawa and to make the trade-offs in cost, time, devotion and loyalty, and conflicting instruction to break through the natural barriers that prevent many Asian instructors from teaching the best they have to offer. Fortunately, in the globalized world of the early 21st century, there are organizations that help non-Okinawan karateka make connections and arrange training periods with some of the best masters on the island. In the current information age, there is also an abundant flow of information about available training opportunities and assessments of various instructors and schools. In addition, many foreign instructors (and a few Okinawans and Japanese) are not only working hard to preserve "traditional" karate, but to advance our knowledge of how to apply its time-honored wisdom in the modern age. All this suggests that despite the popularity of MMA and the pessimism of some that the days of "traditional" karate are numbered, the future is actually bright. For those willing to dedicate the time and effort, the opportunities to learn are better than they have ever been.

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