

**A Comparison of
The Pinnacle by Master R. A. Trias
and Shorei-ryu: A Definitive Kyohan by A. Rench**

**A Ronbun Submitted to
Terry B. Sanders, Hanshi
Kondo No Shokai
in Partial Fulfillment for the Rank of Godan
in the Art of Shorei-ryu Karate**

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Introduction

The Pinnacle by Robert Trias and *Shorei-ryu: A Definitive Kyohan* by Alan Rench are both texts that outline the author's idea of a complete karate system. Both volumes contain a section on history plus the components of a physical performance system. A major difference between the two works is that *The Pinnacle* is laid out by rank requirement progressing from lowest to highest. *Shorei-ryu* describes a complete system but does not assign rank requirements. Instead, Mr. Rench breaks down the material by type of activity, specifically kihon waza (not to be confused with kihon kumite waza used by Master Trias), kata, bogyu waza, kumite waza and kumite. Based on the order in which the material is presented in each section there is an implied hierarchy of skills.

It is worth noting that the term kihon waza is used differently in each text. In *The Pinnacle* kihon waza are two-person drills while in *Shorei-ryu*, kihon waza is the term used to describe basic individual techniques. For clarity within this paper, the term "basic techniques" will be used instead of kihon waza as used by Mr. Rench and "kihon waza" when referring to the two-person drills described by Master Trias.

Both books contain extensive vocabularies with definitions of Japanese terms commonly used in karate or the martial arts. Mr. Rench compiles his terms in a glossary in the back of the book while Master Trias has terms spread throughout the book as they apply at various rank levels. Both books are useful in this regard. No in-depth comparison of the terms contained in each book will be attempted.

Master Trias' book contains a section dedicated to Hsing Yi as a precursor to Shuri-ryu karate. Mr. Rench mentions that Hsing Yi is a precursor system to Shorei-ryu

but does not cover it. Since neither claim that knowledge of Hsing Yi is a requirement, this difference seems inconsequential.

Both books have sections on student training methods, ethics, attitude, etc. Both are interesting and useful and in general have similar points to make. I found Master Trias' text more succinct on these points.

Even though they are laid out differently, *The Pinnacle* and *Shorei-ryu* both contain similar categories of skill performance activities. This paper will compare the performance material along general categories but will not try to compare rank requirements. The following categories will be compared: history, basic techniques, kata, two-person sets, sparring and instructional methods for sparring.

It is worth noting that Master Trias includes some kobudo techniques and kobudo kata within the framework of his karate requirements. In addition, he has a section on kobudo that is excluded from the karate requirements. Mr. Rench has a small section on kobudo near the end of his book but none is included within the Shorei-ryu material. Since there are Okinawan karate systems that include kobudo and others that do not, the choice to do so or not must be viewed as strictly personal preference. Therefore, this paper will not discuss the kobudo information found in either text.

Lastly, both texts cover in some fashion the role of the student and how they should relate to the instructor and the dojo. Both texts call for honorable students who respect others. Differences in the details will not be covered.

History

Much of the historical information in *The Pinnacle* is about the USKA and Master Trias. *Shorei-ryu* contains more general history and covers more detail on the

origins of karate and shorei as a style. *Shorei-ryu* includes a section on the USKA and Master Trias' contribution to the spread of karate within the United States. Mr. Rench's book also includes a section on his own organization, the OSSKK. However, since both the USKA and the OSSKK have ceased to exist this is interesting only in a historical sense. Both books have numerous photos concerning Okinawa and the past masters of Okinawan karate. The historical information is interesting but actually contributes little to the style-specific material.

The Basic Techniques

In *The Pinnacle* Master Trias does not define specific basic techniques but the Japanese terms listed for the various ranks contain the names of numerous individual techniques. By inference it is assumed these constitute the basic techniques for his system. Mr. Rench provides names and a photographic example for each basic technique he considers part of his system. However, neither text contains extensive explanations or discussions about how to perform these basic techniques. It is impossible to say how either list of basic techniques was constructed. It is certain that neither is meant to be all inclusive. An overview of the two lists shows that by name, at least, the lists are very similar. Performance of these techniques seems similar based on the pictures and explanations for the kata.

The Kata

In both texts kata is a central element. Both texts include extensive explanations and photos describing how to perform the kata. Master Trias discusses three general methods for performing kata. These are first as a solo exercise, second as an explanatory self-defense for the movements and third as self-defense against opponents who will

provide realistic attacks. Mr. Rench has little to say about methods for performing kata other than within the complete description for each kata. However, since the two-person sets that are built into Mr. Rench's system are taken from the kata they somewhat accomplish what Master Trias suggests as part of learning kata.

Comparing the kata by name, here are the two lists:

| <u>Trias</u> | <u>Rench</u> |
|----------------------|--------------|
| Taikyoku 1-3 | Gekisai |
| Wunsu | Sanchin |
| Anaku | Saifa |
| Naihanchi 1-3 | Wansu |
| Sanchin | Anaku |
| Empi sho | Sepai |
| Tsue sho (bo) | Kararunha |
| Bassai dai | Rohai |
| Go pei sho | Seiunchin |
| Dan enn sho | Bassai |
| Nandansho (nisheshi) | Naihanchi |
| Kan ku sho | Nisheshi |
| Te katana (sai) | Suparinpei |
| Gimku shu (sai) | Kusanku |
| Tensho | |

We can see that many of the kata are on both lists. For those kata on both lists we will compare their movements. Others will not be compared other than to discuss possible reasons for their exclusion in Shorei-ryu.

A comparison of those kata that are part of both systems follows.

For sanchin kata, there are some differences in the execution of the kata though not in application of self-defense nor in the purpose for the kata. *The Pinnacle* version has two less steps after the initial turn than the version described in the *Shorei-ryu*. There are also minor differences in specific stances. Both texts give long explanations of the meaning for this kata, the chi-kung involved, the breathing, the control and flow of ki (chi). The descriptions are not identical, nor do they exactly agree on the performance methods. However, they do agree on the essence of this kata and the reasons it is important to karate.

For wansu kata, comparing the techniques, footwork, direction of movement, etc. it is fairly obvious that the difference between the two kata versions is minimal. Except for a few minor differences in stance and technique, the two kata are the same.

For anaku kata, it is evident that the two versions are from the same root source. Almost all movements coincide. The differences are in the specific stances, the specific techniques used at a particular step and variations in shifting during execution. Again, these two versions hardly qualify as different.

For bassai/bassai dai, while both of these are identified as “dai” they are not the same kata. The pattern is different, the techniques are different, and the stances are different. There are a few spots of commonality. Since there are numerous versions of

the bassai/passai kata in use in Okinawa/Japan and it is not hard to imagine two different ones being chosen. Why Mr. Rench chose not to retain Master Trias' bassai is unknown.

For naihanchi kata, the biggest difference is that Master Trias runs naihanchi as 3 separate kata while Mr. Rench has it as one long form. The three parts are nearly the same as the one long form. So, other than the decision to combine the parts, these must be considered the same kata. Discussions about which method for running naihanchi is the most authentic are fairly hard to substantiate, so this difference becomes one of personal preference for the author.

For nandansho/niseishi, again these two kata are more alike than different. Generally they follow the same pattern but several short sections differ significantly. Since the differences represent only about 20% of the kata, it seems reasonable to consider the two kata the same.

For kankusho/kusanku, while these two kata seem to be identifiably from the same family, they are not the same kata. Master Trias uses kankusho and Mr. Rench has selected kusanku dai. Not only are the names different, in this case, there are significant differences in performance.

And what about the kata that appear on Master Trias' list but are not on Mr. Rench's list? Excluding the weapons kata those kata are taikyoku 1-3, empi sho, go pei sho, dan enn sho and tensho.

In the case of go pei sho and dan enn sho, Master Trias states in the Pinnacle that he reconstructed these kata from information obtained from a Chinese source. They do not appear on lists of kata common on Okinawa. Most likely that is why they were excluded from Mr. Rench's kata selections.

Taikyoku 1, 2, 3 are generally considered “beginner” kata formulated by Funakoshi. A likely reason they are excluded from Mr. Rench’s list.

While the movements are not the same, empi sho is often taken to be a reformulation of wansu. If that is accepted, why do both? A possible reason for exclusion.

And finally, the kata that Mr. Rench added that are not on Master Trias’ list. They are gekisai, saifa, sepai, kararunha, rohai, seiunchin and suparinpei. Why were these kata substituted for those that were deleted? It is interesting to note that the final list of kata Mr. Rench settled on is nearly identical to the kata listed for training in a Japanese karate system called Shorei-ryu as practiced by Mr. Joe Swift.

It is important to understand that Mr. Rench started with a kata list that was already different from that published by Master Trias in *The Pinnacle*. This list comes from the shorei-ryu/shorei-goju list established at an earlier date and which Master Trias had revised himself as part of publishing *The Pinnacle*.

The list of kata that Mr. Rench had to work with can be found in his two volume set *Modern Methods of Shorei-ryu Volumes 1 and 2*. The kata contained within these books are taikyoku, pinan 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, gekisai, wunsu, sanchin, anaku, rohai, empi, and bassai.

From this it seems Mr. Rench both added and deleted kata that Master Trias has in *The Pinnacle*. Plus Mr. Rench added kata that do not appear on either previous list. Why is probably not knowable. To speculate, it first seems that Mr. Rench was trying to recreate a closer kinship to antique Shorei-ryu or at least to recognizable Okinawan karate. To do that it seems he used goju-ryu as the basis for his model. Since it is widely

accepted that the Naha-te traditions (antique shorei) follow the lineage from Kanryo Higashionna through Chojun Miyagi who formulated goju-ryu, this does not seem indefensible. However, goju-ryu is not the only surviving system based on antique shorei. To'on-ryu has at least as solid a claim on antique shorei roots as goju and the two systems are far from identical. Regardless of why these substitute kata were chosen, it is clear that they are all more mainstream kata recognized currently on Okinawan.

In addition, Mr. Rench states that his kata list is a mix of 60% naha-te, 30% shuri-te and 10% tomari-te. He also says his goal was to research and define a smaller amount of material that should be more fully learned and that represents authentic, verifiable Okinawan karate methods.

The Two-person sets

Each book contains sets of two-person drills that are various manifestations of self-defense sets. Bogyu waza are found in *Shorei-ryu* and the Kihon, Ippon, and Tae zu wazas are in *The Pinnacle*. While both books document two-person drills their derivation is not easily compared. Bogyu waza comes directly from bunkai of kata movements. The two-person drills from *The Pinnacle* cannot be so easily traced. However, the results of training in either type yields similar performance skills so they will be compared as a group.

As mentioned earlier, both texts contain and require training with partners to gain and improve skills. Mr. Rench has bogyu waza taken from kata. There are 49 of these self-defense sets taken from the 14 kata in his list. Master Trias has kihon waza, ippon waza and taezu naru waza. There are 30 kihon waza, 25 ippon kumite waza and 10 taezu for a total of 65. Both sets are structured similarly. An attacker and a defender begin

facing each other. The attacker steps back to assume the attack position, the defender then practices the prescribed defense against that attack. Both train the karateka in maai (distance), timing, body positioning and footwork. The sets contained in *The Pinnacle* are reminiscent of the Shotokan one-steps rather than sets extracted from kata. It is perhaps for this reason that Mr. Rench deleted Master Trias' two-person sets and replaced them with applications tied directly to kata. Other research shows that using two-person sets extracted from kata is more common on Okinawa. And it seems that tying the 2-person sets to the kata more completely integrates the system's parts.

Sparring and sparring methods

Both texts cover sparring in various sections. Mr. Rench breaks sparring into free style and waza to help the student improve their sparring abilities. Master Trias has sections that cover more general concepts of sparring and various drills that can be used to enhance and train students. Both systems depend heavily on the individual instructor to teach, coach and help students improve their kumite abilities. However, the approach used by Mr. Rench seems to be aimed at systematizing the training to make it less dependent on the instructor.

Conclusion

While at first it may seem that these two texts have little in common, closer examination suggests that perhaps they have more similarities than differences. Certain themes occur in both texts. While they may not use identical combinations, kata or sparring recipes, they both advocate and require training in similar categories and certainly have in mind similar outcomes – competent karateka who are good citizens, who can defend themselves and are capable of mental and physical discipline. From a

broad perspective, *The Pinnacle* seems more representative of Japanese karate and *Shorei-ryu* more Okinawan. Either may be a good source book for karate with the choice being one of personal preference. In short, it can be said for both texts (quoted from Sanders Hanshi) “Not wrong, different.”