

# WHAT IS MATAYOSHI KOBUDO?

Written by F. Lohse and M. Clayton

With illustrations by G. Wong

Matayoshi Kobudo is a globally recognised martial art, yet there is no real global consensus about what the art constitutes, when it was named or how it should be practised. Though many are able (or at least claim to be able) to recognise what is Matayoshi Kobudo and what is not, the term is confusing and not without controversy. Matayoshi Shinpo did not introduce the term to refer to his art, and some students of Matayoshi Shinpo from the 1960s and the early days of the ZOKR take



umbrage with the term Matayoshi Kobudo itself. They feel strongly that while Matayoshi Shinpo was the leader, material, information, and technique were gathered from a variety of sources and brought together to constitute the Kobudo of both the Zen Okinawa Kobudo Renmei and his Kodokan dojo. Therefore, labelling it Matayoshi Kobudo is considered by some to be disrespectful to the contributions made by others. At the same time, various groups around the globe who now practice Matayoshi Kobudo slightly differently, sometimes claim they have the sole “real” or “authentic” Matayoshi Kobudo. As a result, the term itself is somewhat fraught, particularly for those without knowledge of its historical development.

## Origins and Circumstance of the Term ‘Matayoshi Kobudo’

Shinko Matayoshi was a famous Okinawan martial artist who died in 1948. He had an excellent reputation and many people wanted to learn kobujutsu from him. After his death, his son Shinpo became regarded as the best source of his kobujutsu. Matayoshi Shinpo worked in Japan immediately after the war and returned to Okinawa around 1960. He started teaching soon after and opened his dojo, the Kodokan, in the 1970s. According to first hand testimony, the term ‘Matayoshi Kobudo’ was not used before the 1960s and it is possible the first use of the term was by American soldiers who began training with Matayoshi Shinpo in those days. Matayoshi Shinpo referred to his own martial arts style in various ways- Ryukyu Kobujutsu, Okinawa Kobudo, “my kobudo”, Kingai Ryu, and Kingai Ryu Tode Kobujutsu. He referred to the weapons arts he practised simply as Kobujutsu in the early days and as Okinawan Kobudo after 1970. Some western sources indicate that in later years (1990s) Matayoshi Shinpo would occasionally use the term Matayoshi Kobudo to refer to the Kobujutsu he learned from his father. Other sources including Matayoshi Shinpo’s Okinawan students say the term ‘Matayoshi Kobudo’ was not commonly used until after his death in 1997. It was used on the banner at the memorial celebration for his passing and this may have been the first formal use in Okinawa.



It therefore appears the term ‘Matayoshi Kobudo’ was probably introduced by others (including westerners) who wished to find a short hand way of referring to the kobudo/kobujutsu taught under

the direction of Matayoshi Shinpo. It seems to have been adopted in a haphazard fashion on Okinawa, and various groups currently either use it or reject it, for their own reasons. Internationally the term is well recognised in martial arts circles and its colloquial meaning is the kobudo taught by Matayoshi Shinpo. At the same time, while it is used informally on Okinawa and globally to refer to the general art virtually none of the former senior students of Matayoshi Shinpo have used it to formally name their organization or dojo. It seems to act then more as an informal reference than an actual title. Since it has risen colloquially and its meaning is poorly defined that is not surprising. However, this lack of clear definition, used informally or not, has resulted in numerous different opinions about what constitutes Matayoshi Kobudo what does not.



The purpose of this paper is to try and offer some insights into what possible definitions exist for the term and in so doing provide practitioners of Matayoshi Kobudo a reference point for locating their own practice within the global kobudo diaspora. This paper is only interested in investigating possible definitions through the evidence available, and is intended to be bias neutral. It is not intended to provide a definition that the larger kobudo community "should" adopt, and thereby define others' practice or lineage as inside or outside "Matayoshi Kobudo", however that is to be defined. Instead, the goal is to provide some context for examining various viewpoints on what is and what is not Matayoshi Kobudo by looking at various possible definitions for the term and how these definitions could be applied to what is currently an amorphous, ambiguous, and on occasion a highly politicised term. The researchers understand that their own experiences may generate bias and as such both researchers, who come from different backgrounds, countries and instructors, have taken the role of scrutinising each other's sources and perspectives. This short essay in this way claims neutrality.

While from various historical and political viewpoints the definition of Matayoshi Kobudo may seem obvious, the competing definitions espoused by different organizations make it clear this is not the case. Therefore, to start the discussion we would like to present some possible definitions of Matayoshi Kobudo and take a brief look at their strengths and weaknesses.

### **'Matayoshi Kobudo' is the Kobujutsu Passed Down in the Matayoshi Family**

This definition begins with the assertion that kobujutsu has been associated with the Matayoshi family for many generations. It further suggests that there was a continuous transmission of technique from one Matayoshi generation to the next. Matayoshi Shinpo, as well as Matayoshi Shinko, asserted this, and it seems reasonable to take it as fact. However, this does not provide a very good definition of Matayoshi Kobudo for the present day. It implies a limitation- that the content of Matayoshi Kobudo is what the Matayoshi family passed down. Given Matayoshi Shinko's extensive instruction from people outside the family this definition would then have to exclude all the Kingai and Gokenki material, the sai, tonfa, nunchiyaku, kama, all of the bo kata taught as the main syllabus now, and in fact the bulk of the rest of the weaponry of the system.

Furthermore, Matayoshi Shinpo added to the system with the help of students and training partners, and this material would also have to be excluded. It appears from what documentation is available that regardless of what principles may be contained in the kata the main concrete element currently practiced originally coming from the family may solely be Tsuken Akachu no Eku Di.

Matayoshi Shinpo was proud of his ancestry and made his descent from the famous Shinjo Gima well known (he even owned a bo that is said to have belonged to Gima and has been passed down in the family). He felt equally proud of the long association between the martial arts and his family. This pride in ancestry was a key feature of Shinpo's identity, but whilst the phrase 'Matayoshi Kobudo' links a name with a martial art it is important to understand exactly to what extent the Kobudo and the family are connected. As noted above, many of the techniques and kata currently practised did not come from Shinko, Shinpo, or indeed anyone else in the family. And finally, though Matayoshi Yasushi is now the leader of the family and recognised Soke of the Kodokan dojo he has never been a practicing martial artist and has described himself to the researchers as "only the son and the grandson and no master".

Therefore, defining Matayoshi Kobudo as solely the kobudo passed down in the Matayoshi family over multiple generations eliminates most of what is currently practiced as Matayoshi Kobudo. It also implies that there may be no longer any continuation of the art, since no current living Matayoshi practices Kobudo. If Matayoshi Kobudo contains a great deal of material that came from outside the family and also currently exists primarily through the practice and propagation of those outside of the family, then it is hard to see defining it as something solely passed down in the family as a viable definition, despite the importance of the family influence. It has simply become bigger than them, which in itself is a credit to the work they have done.

### **'Matayoshi Kobudo' is the Kobujutsu of Matayoshi Shinko**

Matayoshi Shinko was a very famous martial artist during the early twentieth century in Okinawa. In addition to the family material passed down by his father Matayoshi Shinchin, he studied with Shishi Ryoko, Agena Chokuho, Ire Okina, Yamane Chinen, Kingai Roshi, Go Kenki, and several other Okinawan and Chinese experts. Many people learned kobujutsu from Matayoshi Shinko and he taught in several dojo on Okinawa. While there is a reasonable claim to be made that the root of current day Matayoshi Kobudo is the kobudo of Matayoshi Shinko there are some obvious problems with this definition.



Many martial artists today can trace some of their kobujutsu heritage back to Shinko Matayoshi and his students. Since a few did not train with Shinpo this does potentially break any monopoly on the term Shinpo and his students might claim. However, the majority of those, people like Maeshiro Shusei, at one point or another actually did train with Matayoshi Shinpo or were members of the Zen Okinawa Kobudo Renmei. This filters most all of Shinko's teachings through his son Shinpo in one way or another, in essence diluting the primacy of Shinko's teaching vis-à-vis this definition.

More relevantly this definition also implies that any changes or additions to the system made by Matayoshi Shinpo are not Matayoshi Kobudo, therefore placing Shinpo and all his students outside the rubric of Matayoshi Kobudo. This seems unreasonable to say the least.

One of Matayoshi Shinpo's most important contributions to the Okinawan martial arts was to pass on the kobujutsu of his father. The material and concepts that came from Shinko and his various teachers are the core of the art. For that reason, Shinko can be considered the primary source of the art and in that way his contributions could constitute a definition of Matayoshi Kobujutsu. However as Matayoshi Shinpo matured and his own reputation and possibly skills surpassed that of his father then what was Shinko's kobujutsu gave way gradually to Shinpo. For this reason, limiting the term

Matayoshi Kobudo to that material which came directly from Matayoshi Shinko does not seem to work as a definition.

### **‘Matayoshi Kobudo’ is the Kobudo of Matayoshi Shinpo**

Matayoshi Shinpo was famous as a teacher and promoter of Kobudo and of the Okinawan martial arts in general. He was a key figure in the introduction of the term ‘Kobudo’ to the world and the formalization of Kobudo instruction that started in the 60s and continues through to this day. The purpose of this formalization was to provide a platform by which kobudo could be transmitted in a similar manner to the already successful Karate-Do. He and others formed a Kobudo organisation in 1972 called the Zen Okinawa Kobudo Renmei – ZOKR 全沖繩古武道連盟 and Shinpo was chosen as its first president.



The kobudo he taught was based in what his father taught him, but he also trained under a number of other teachers and their input, as well as input from various peers, friends and senior students, informed the kobudo he taught in significant ways. The kobudo he practised was therefore very definitely not just his father’s. Matayoshi Shinpo could be reasonably argued to be the person most responsible for the modern global popularity of Okinawan Kobudo. Between his promotion of the art and his clear technical direction of his dojo and the ZOKR, one very reasonable definition of the term Matayoshi Kobudo is not surprisingly the kobudo taught and promoted by Matayoshi Shinpo.

However, as a functional definition this is more problematic than it first appears. Matayoshi Shinpo taught techniques and even kata and sequences within kata differently throughout his lifetime. Partly through the influence of others (whose kata and methods he adopted) and partly through his own skills development, those who learned from him in the 1950s and 60s learned differently to those who learned from him in the 80s and 90s. To add confusion to this, he would at times teach slightly differently to different students, in part based on their karate background and preferences. Therefore, while as a terminological definition it is fairly simple and fairly clear, in practical terms it is difficult to say which teaching of Matayoshi Shinpo should be prioritised over which, if any should. Some argue that the way he taught at the end of his life was the most developed and represents his ‘final word’. However others, who were taught earlier in his life, claim that he taught them in the ‘true’ or undiluted way and according to original methods. Most importantly in regards to a definition, whichever position one might adopt it cannot be disputed that there are students from different periods who studied directly under Shinpo for extended periods and yet whose kobudo is not the same. Any claim to the “sole” or “correct” transmission is essentially then a matter of opinion as much as anything else. Certainly using the term Matayoshi Kobudo to refer to any kobudo taught by Matayoshi Shinpo makes sense, but it does not serve to eliminate or prioritize any particular part or period of his teaching over any other.

### **‘Matayoshi Kobudo’ is the Kobudo of the Zen Okinawa Kobudo Renmei**

In the late 1960s many Kobujutsu experts in Okinawa came together to help promote Okinawan Kobujutsu under the new term ‘Kobudo’. They wanted the art to be seen as distinct from Karate and to help differentiate it agreed on a new uniform of Black Gi top with White Gi trousers. This group

became known as the Zen Okinawan Kobudo Renmei (ZOKR) and Matayoshi Shinpo was its first president. The Renmei chose to use a logo previously designed by Matayoshi Shinpo consisting of a Kiku surrounding a Mitsu Domoe. The Hidari Mitsu Domoe represents the Ryukyu Kingdom and the Kiku is a mark of respect to both Shinko and the Japanese Imperial house. The Kiku (chrysanthemum) is also a flower associated with growth and prosperity in Okinawa and this made the design doubly appealing. (The logo was redesigned several times by Matayoshi Shinpo during his lifetime but these changes were only modifications of the existing design.) The ZOKR kobudo was based in the kobudo Matayoshi Shinpo taught. However it also included techniques brought in from various other members; though Matayoshi Shinpo was the president, the weapons, katas and techniques performed by the group did not all come solely from him. Rightly or wrongly the Kobudo of the Renmei became known as 'Matayoshi Kobudo' in the west because of Shinpo's leadership. The uniform and logo of the ZOKR have also become synonymous with the term Matayoshi Kobudo.

The Renmei still exists and is currently led by Miyagi Koki and supported by some of the leading Kobudo experts on Okinawa. As a possible definition of Matayoshi Kobudo, the ZOKR kobudo has a very valid claim. Matayoshi Shinpo acted as president from its founding until he passed away, and his Kodokan dojo was the head dojo. However, it presents certain problems as well. Member dojo showed variation in technique and content during Matayoshi sensei's life (He did not seem to see much of a problem with that, but it of course presents difficulty if one is trying to decide which variation is the most "valid"). After Shinpo's passing the organization tried to assert more formal control over variation in content. This in turn led to various senior members leaving. So while the ZOKR was in many ways the home of Matayoshi Sensei's kobudo for decades, with variation in content and many former senior members now no longer affiliated, not to mention seniors who were never affiliated, it seems that as a current-day definition it is not very complete. While the ZOKR was certainly a locus for the development and propagation of Matayoshi Kobudo, suggesting the term Matayoshi Kobudo should be essentially synonymous with the ZOKR would exclude anyone not a member, including many former senior students of Shinpo. This is obviously not reasonable.

### **'Matayoshi Kobudo' is the Kobudo of the Kodokan Dojo**

This definition is very similar to that of Matayoshi Shinpo's kobudo being the best definition of Matayoshi Kobudo. Although Matayoshi Shinpo was president of the ZOKR and his Kodokan dojo was the Honbu, the techniques and kata practiced at the Kodokan were sometimes different from those which the rest of the Renmei practised. Matayoshi Shinpo would make changes or improvements to



the Kobudo he taught throughout his lifetime and his students at the Kodokan were the first to learn and implement these. As such, students who trained regularly at the Kodokan as opposed to those who learned under other senior members of the ZOKR can lay claim to being the closest to Matayoshi Shinpo. It is considered by some that those who trained most often and longest with Matayoshi Shinpo therefore learned the most and were the true holders of Shinpo's kobudo. However, later Kodokan students were always considered junior in relative terms to the senior grades of the ZOKR making this definition easily contestable, at least on Okinawa. At the same time, it prioritizes those Kodokan members who were most present in the dojo in last years of Shinpo's life. This makes sense in many ways, but is also contested by some who learned earlier and did not assume any changes

made after they left the dojo, often through the assertion that they are teaching the “old ways”. Coupled with the fact that there were many other dojo practicing the kobudo taught by Shinpo and/or the ZOKR this also makes a Kodokan-centric definition somewhat incomplete in that it excludes many senior practitioners of the system.

### **‘Matayoshi Kobudo’ is the Kobudo of Gakiya Yoshiaki**

Before his death in 1997, Matayoshi Shinpo chose Yoshiaki Gakiya to assume the title of technical director at the Kodokan Dojo, formally the third Kancho of his kobudo. He felt that of all his students, Gakiya was the best choice for passing on his Kobudo legacy. This suggests that Matayoshi Shinpo believed Gakiya’s knowledge and techniques were the best amongst his students. As such, following the death of Shinpo, many (particularly from the west) chose to seek out instruction from Gakiya. So, if we were to assume that Matayoshi Kobudo is the kobudo Matayoshi Shinpo taught, and that it is best represented by what he taught at the end of his life, it could seem clear that this is best represented by the person he chose as his successor.

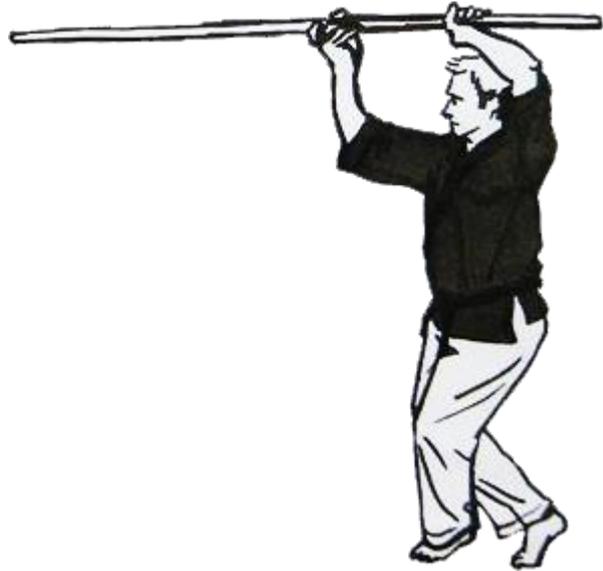


There are a number of issues that do make this more complex however. It is important to note that Gakiya was not chosen to act as technical director for the ZOKR and within this organisation he would be considered relatively junior. The Renmei had experts, including Maeshiro Shusei, Miyahira Choshin, and others, who had trained in Kobudo longer, had higher rank, and who took responsibility for the larger organisation after Matayoshi Sensei’s passing. At the same time, there were other former members of the Kodokan or ZOKR who were ranked higher or who had started training before Gakiya Sensei. While none of this affects the clear statement of transmission Matayoshi Shinpo made in naming Gakiya his successor it does create a more complex context for using this transmission as the sole definition of the term as it thereby removes all practitioners who did not align under Gakiya from the rubric of Matayoshi Kobudo, something Gakiya himself would not approve of. Other senior students of Matayoshi Shinpo at the Kodokan were peers of his and did not adopt Gakiya as their Sensei following the death of Matayoshi Shinpo, and neither did various seniors from the ZOKR and other dojo, but that does not mean they are not practicing Matayoshi kobudo. Upon leaving the Kodokan in 2001 Gakiya created a new organization called the Okinawa Kobudo Doushi Renseikai. While his dedication to passing on Shinpo’s kobudo is very clear, like Shinpo, he did not officially use the term Matayoshi Kobudo to describe his legacy. Taken together, while the clear statement of succession provides what for some may be a straightforward way to define Matayoshi Kobudo after the passing of Matayoshi Shinpo the complexities around this succession make it less than complete in many ways.

### **‘Matayoshi Kobudo’ is the Kobudo of Miyahira Choshin or Maeshiro Shusei**

Miyahira Choshin and Maeshiro Shusei were two of the highest ranked students of the ZOKR, indeed two of the highest ranked students of Matayoshi Shinpo. Following the death of Shinpo, Miyahira became the president of the ZOKR and Maeshiro the technical director. Miyahira was strictly committed to transmitting the techniques as agreed by the Renmei at the time of its inception and

early developmental period and the renmei adopted this approach so meticulously that Maeshiro, the technical director, was challenged over demonstrations that seemed to show slight variations in technique, eventually resulting in him leaving the organization. For those who feel the Kobudo of the ZOKR most closely defines 'Matayoshi Kobudo', it would naturally follow that Miyahara or Maeshiro are the inheritors of the style, and hence the term. Of course all the issues that surround defining Matayoshi Kobudo as the kobudo of ZOKR are relevant here as well. In addition, Maeshiro's first teacher was Kakazu Mitsuo (student of Shinko), not Matayoshi Shinpo, which adds a further wrinkle to the complexities of this definition. It has merit, but also seems rather incomplete in that it would exclude anyone that did not align under one of these men.



#### **'Matayoshi Kobudo' is the Kobudo overseen by Matayoshi Yasushi**

Matayoshi Yasushi is now the Soke of the Kodokan Dojo, and the Kingai Ryu Tode Kobujutsu of Matayoshi Shinpo. He was given this title by his father, and is the only son of Matayoshi Shinpo. Although his kobujutsu and tode practice has been limited, his knowledge of his father's life, family history and spiritual thoughts about kobudo are substantial. The split role of Soke (lineage holder) and chief instructor is not unknown in Japanese martial arts, and different instructors have filled the technical role at the Kodokan since Shinpo's death. For many people around the world the Kodokan is considered the spiritual home of 'Matayoshi Kobudo' and Matayoshi Shinpo did choose his son to become Soke and act as the spiritual head of the dojo. For these reasons many feel naturally drawn to Yasushi for guidance on things connected to Matayoshi Shinpo and his kobudo.

However, whilst Yasushi holds the position of Soke of the Kodokan, few senior teachers are formally associated with the dojo and there is limited connection between the Kodokan dojo and those teachers who may be considered most senior in the world. The Kodokan now uses the title 'Matayoshi Kobudo Kodokan' whereas during Shinpo's lifetime it was just the 'Kodokan' and while the title certainly reflects some claim to ownership over the term, with so much of the technical background located elsewhere and such a large body of non-affiliated senior students world-wide, it is difficult to see this as the sole source of what is informally referred to as Matayoshi Kobudo.

Essentially this definition is a continuation of the family definition above and the expansion of the art outside the family acts in the same way here. While certainly Yasushi has complete control over the Kodokan dojo and provides a unique living link to the family history, the global diaspora of his father's kobudo has grown enormously. Even though his position as Kodokan Soke gives him a unique position vis a vis his father's dojo, given the intricate mix of connections involved and the number of non-affiliated seniors it seems clear the art is now larger than the practice represented solely by his leadership.

**Matayoshi Kobudo is the Kobudo of any one of a number of senior practitioners that currently run their own organizations.**

This, in its various iterations, is the real crux of this terminological issue today. There are a number of different organizations and dojo teaching Matayoshi Kobudo currently operating around the globe. Many are led by former senior students of Matayoshi Shinpo, people who were highly ranked and who



trained with Shinpo for many years, some starting as early as 1960. Some examples include (alphabetically) Adaniya Seisuke, Chinen Kenyu, Andrea Guarelli, Ishiki Hidetada, Itokazu Seisho, Kinjo Takashi, Miyagi Koki, Oshiro Zenei, Neil Stolsmark, Kimo Wall, and Yamashiro Kenichi. Given the ranks and experience of the leaders of these various groups, all can make good claim to carrying on the tradition of Matayoshi Kobudo. But while all these teachers and their groups are very obviously situated within the rubric of Matayoshi Kobudo, it is very difficult to see any of them as the sole arbiter of the Matayoshi tradition. Doing so would eliminate all the others, as well as people like Gakiya Yoshiaki and Matayoshi Yasushi, something that seems obviously

inappropriate. While some of these groups may claim a position as sole arbiter, a reasonable terminological definition of the term Matayoshi Kobudo would not support these claims.

#### **Discussion: Perhaps 'Matayoshi Kobudo' is defined broadly by all of the above?**

So where does that leave us? In many ways all of the above can be accepted as valid definitions of the term 'Matayoshi Kobudo', at least in part. Indeed, it is very hard to reject any of them completely and thereby say they are *not* Matayoshi Kobudo. At the same time, none really encapsulate the whole set of meanings this term has come to represent. Interestingly enough, it is the exclusionary nature of many of these definitions that makes accepting just one of them difficult, which in itself forms an important window on both the popular use of the term and how large the community operating under it is.

Of all these definitions, the one that seems the most useful is that Matayoshi Kobudo is loosely defined as the kobudo Matayoshi Shinpo taught. This definition subsumes most of the others, per the discussion above. It is loose, however, because unless it is further narrowed to imply only a particular period of instruction or particular lineage it leaves room for all the different students of Shinpo and the ZOKR. It therefore also leaves room for the variation in instruction over Shinpo's life and across the ZOKR and for the students from those various periods to remain represented by the term Matayoshi Kobudo.

While that may not be a very satisfying definition for any group looking to take sole ownership of the term, it is not surprising given its origins. The term has formed via a bottom up rather than a top down process. This means that it did not originate with a clear meaning in place. Students coined the phrase 'Matayoshi Kobudo', collectively, informally and affectionately. Anecdotal evidence demonstrates that while Matayoshi Shinpo himself did not create the term 'Matayoshi Kobudo' in later years he did recognise and acknowledge that others were using it. In other words, while he did not create it, he also did not reject it. Currently, students from a variety of lineages identify themselves as practising 'Matayoshi Kobudo', primarily because they all recognise Matayoshi Shinpo as the principle source of

their Kobudo and through the various lineages, all students of Matayoshi Kobudo train in pretty much the same material.



Most students of Matayoshi Shinpo remember him being quite strict about what was correct technique and what was not. Therefore, when some of these people see techniques they remember Shinpo saying were incorrect being demonstrated by people claiming to do Matayoshi Kobudo it can rankle them. However, this probably cannot be helped. In particular, because Shinpo taught differently at different stages of his life, students from those different periods may have very different understandings of what constitutes proper technique. It is not surprising they would see other versions of technique and feel they are incorrect, because based on what they were taught they are incorrect. But Shinpo's kobudo was not static, and perhaps realizing that would assist in keeping the definition of the term Matayoshi Kobudo inclusive for those who would otherwise seek to restrict it.

Due in part to the volume of practitioners that now exist worldwide, the technical delivery of Matayoshi Kobudo is diverse. Sometimes the Kobudo of the various lineages can look very different indeed to the trained eye. However, to say one lineage is superior to another may be a matter of personal opinion, or even political perspective, and one that cannot be quantified in any objective way. Of course there are valid questions of understanding and quality of instruction, but again these are often subjective and, for a terminological definition as opposed to a description of technical content, irrelevant. For this reason, it is perhaps reasonable to assume all lineages of former senior students of Matayoshi Shinpo, the ZOKR, and students of other students of Matayoshi Shinko represent 'Matayoshi Kobudo'.

Indeed, the creativity inherent in Shinpo's approach to the art has been mirrored in the various organizations his students have founded. While they all credit his instruction most of them now practice kata their founders have developed alongside those Shinpo passed down. Are these new kata and hojo undo Matayoshi Kobudo, since they have no direct connection to Matayoshi Shinpo? There is a good argument saying they are not, though they are based in the extant material. Over time these developments do promise to further separate the various groups, as their base content continues to change. But at the same time, it is also a testament to the ownership and creativity Shinpo encouraged in his senior students.



There are a large number of people around the world who refer to their Kobudo style as Matayoshi Kobudo, certainly in the thousands, possibly in the tens of thousands. This is a significant achievement for a man (Matayoshi Shinpo) who dedicated his life to the task of increasing the worldwide practice and appreciation of Kobudo. While there are differences in practice, all those practicing Matayoshi Kobudo today are, in essence, a testament to the dedication of Matayoshi Shinpo, and the strength of the art he propagated.

Shinpo himself stayed lifelong friends with almost all of his students including those who practiced kobudo in slightly different ways. He accepted them all at his Kodokan dojo and travelled the world teaching in their dojo. It has been said by some of his long time students that he would have wished for the various groups to accept each other, and share their perspectives on the art, not bicker over who has the “real” Matayoshi Kobudo. After all Shinpo never really defined such a thing, and did not coin the term himself. For that reason alone, it seems appropriate to keep the definition broad and inclusive. A global community of people sharing in friendship an art passed down by a man dedicated to its propagation, the promotion of the culture that it grew from, and the well-being of those practicing it.



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