

KARATE HISTORY

The history of Karate is a vague and often controversial subject. It is overwhelmingly believed that the roots of Karate can be traced back to 6th century China. Dharma, the founder of Zen, created a form of exercises to help the monks and missionaries to improve physical fitness and help protect them from criminals. How Karate developed from Dharma's system is unknown.

In ancient times, citizens were allowed to have and carry weapons. King Sho Hassi united Okinawa under his rule in 1429. Around 1477 in an effort to restore peace and disarm rival clans, his grandson, Sho Shin, prohibited citizens from arming themselves. In 1609, the Shimazu clan of Satsuma (Japan's southernmost province) invaded and took control of Okinawa. As part of the occupation, only the Shimazu samurai were allowed to carry weapons. This ban also prohibited Okinawans from studying or training in martial arts. This forced practitioners underground and teaching was done only by word of mouth.

There were no specific styles or names for Karate back then. There were three areas in Okinawa known for Karate: Naha, Shuri, and Tomari. The styles taught in these areas were called Naha-te, Shuri-te, and Tomari-te, (hand of Naha, etc.) Karate was more commonly called "tode."

The term "Karate" was originally written as "Chinese hand." In 1905, Hanashiro Chomo's book *Karate Kumite* was the first documentation using the current terminology of "empty hand." It wasn't until the 1930's that the term was widely accepted as the art moved into Japan. 1910 saw the introduction of Karate as a separate subject in Okinawan schools, meaning the official recognition of the art. In the early 1920's, many Okinawan masters, including Kenwa Mabuni and Choki Motobu, traveled to Japan to spread the art of Karate. In 1922 Gichin Funakoshi "officially" introduced Karate to Japan by giving a demonstration for the Ministry of Education. In 1935, the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai (the Japanese organization created to preserve, standardize, and promote Japanese martial arts,) decided to formally adopt the meaning "empty hand." (At the time, Japan was invading China and it was widely agreed that calling Japanese martial arts "empty hand" would be much more acceptable to the public than "Chinese hand.")

Karate was influenced by Japanese martial arts in other ways as well. Until the late 1930's, Karate practice focused on kata (forms) and their bunkai (application.) The influence of Judo, Jujutsu, and Kendo helped to bring about the introduction of kumite (sparring.) Thanks to Dr. Jigoro Kano (the founder of Judo,) Karate also uses the ranking system he developed using belts to designate the difference of relative knowledge between students.

After the end of World War II, Karate was introduced to the world. American soldiers brought their training home with them and Japanese organizations began to send instructors across the globe to spread their love of Karate.