

History of Karate by Philip Johnson

Karate only became well known in the western part of the world during the late 60's. It was kept a secret by the Okinawa people. China had a strong influence on Okinawa's Karate style. They called it tode (China hand). The Chinese martial arts system can be traced back to 250BC in India. A monk believed to be called Bodhidharma travelled to China. He eventually he came to the Shoalin Temple in the Songshan Mountains of China. Here he taught and developed a combination of body moves in order to save oneself from harm.

About 1500 years ago the emperor gave permission for the monastery to train an army of monks for help to defend his empire. These monks were very successful and instead of being rewarded the emperor ordered that the monastery was burnt down and the monks were killed, as he felt endangered and threatened by them. Some monks escaped though and they carried on with their style secretly.

In the 1600's and 1700's young Okinawa men individually travelled to Southern China, a lot of them stayed for a long time to study the art of chaun fa. This was fairly easy for the Okinawan men as South China was directly west of Okinawa and Fuzhou was the first port of call.

The Systems of Okinawa.

There are four systems in Okinawa, Shuri te, Naha te, uechi ryu and tomari te. The oldest of the four styles is Shuri Te . Styles that originated from this include Shotokan and Wado Ryu. Shuri Te originated in the city of Shuri. This karate style was suitable for small and weak people and includes fast footwork and emphasized evasive body moves. This typically seen in the Wado Ryu system today.

The second oldest is Naha Te which eventually originated into Goju Ryu systems. This developed in the city of Naha and this style was considered to be a more defensive and internal martial art. This was more for the stronger, more larger person. This style concentrates on absorbing kicks and punches rather than avoiding them. This is why the style is more for the stronger person. The founder of this style was Kanryo Higaonna.

The third style is Tomari Te. This was found in a village between Naha and Shuri and therefore is a mixture of both styles. This system is not taught commercially as a separate style. The styles kata techniques are found in the Shorin Styles.

The fourth style is based upon the Chinese Pangi-Noon Ryu, which is now known as Uechi Ryu. This system emerged from China 40 years ago. Kanbun Uechi was the founder of this style and was a Chinese boxing style. When the founder died, his son, Kangei Uechi changed the name from Pangi-noon to Uechi Ryu.

Arrival of Karate in Japan

Gichin Funakoshi introduced karate into Japan. He taught Karate as a way of life rather than techniques. This helps the student become better self defended and become a better person. This was different to how they learnt the styles in Okinawa, which was self-defence.

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