

WHAT IS KARATE?

The art of Karate is a system of combat developed on the island of Okinawa. Karate may allow you to defeat an opponent by the use of striking and kicking. The students practice hard physical training to develop fighting skills. This training requires strenuous physical and mental discipline. Karate helps with the development of a strong character and builds a feeling of respect toward our fellow man. The study of Karate, therefore, may be valuable to all people, male and female, young and old alike.

The literal meaning of the two Japanese characters which make up the word Karate is "empty hands." This, of course, refers simply to the fact that Karate originated as a system of self-defense which relied on the effective use of the unarmed body of the practitioner. This system consisted of techniques of blocking or thwarting an attack and counter-attacking the opponent by punching, striking or kicking. The modern art of Karate has developed out of a thorough organization of these techniques.

Karate as a means of self-defense has the oldest history, going back hundreds of years. It is only in recent years that the techniques which have been handed down were scientifically studied and the principles evolved for making the most effective use of the various moves of the body. Training based on these principles and knowledge of the working of the muscles and the joints and the vital relation between movement and balance enable the modern student of Karate to be prepared, both physically and psychologically, to defend himself successfully against any would-be assailant.

As a physical art, Karate is almost without equal. Since it is highly dynamic and makes balanced use of a large number of body muscles, it provides excellent all-around exercise and develops coordination and agility.

Many girls and women in Japan have taken up Karate because, in addition to its usefulness as self-defense, it is especially good for the figure. It is widely practiced by both children and older people as a means of keeping in top physical condition, and many schools are promoting it as a physical art among their students.

As a sport, Karate has a relatively short history. Contest rules have been devised, however, and it is now possible to hold actual matches as in other competitive sports. because of the speed, the variety of techniques, and the split-second timing it calls for, many athletic-minded people have come to show an interest in competitive Karate and there is every indication that it will continue to grow in popularity.

Western (non-Japanese) students may be interested to know that the Japan Karate Association emphasizes Karate's character-building aspects, in which respect for one's opponent (sportsmanship) is the cardinal principle. The maxims which are taught to the students can be summarized in the following five words:

CHARACTER

SINCERITY

EFFORT

ETIQUETTE

SELF-CONTROL

How The Word "Karate" Developed

"TE"

Prior to the 20th Century, many terms were used to describe certain forms existing in Okinawa. These forms were not found in Japan nor in China but many similarities were found in these countries.

"Chan Fa and Ken Fat"

The meaning of "Kempo" in Japanese is "The Law Of The Fist" or "The Way Of Fist". "Kempo" is read as "Chan Fa" in Mandarin and "Ken Fat" in Cantonese in China.

"Tode"

The great mighty Tang Dynasty influenced Japan in many ways. Government representatives had been exchanged during the Sui period but it was during the Tang period that the Japanese learned Chinese culture very deeply. There were many buildings built imitating Chinese design. So great was the influence by T'ang that the character "To" (also known as "Kara") was used as an adjective meaning "T'ang=China." For example, Kara Ningyo=China doll and To Jin=Chinese people. It is understandable that either Japanese or Okinawans named the fighting forms developed in Okinawa as "Tode" (then also read as "Karate"), not because these forms came from China but because of unknown factors. As a custom, when there was something unknown to Japanese people, they were pleased to believe that it must have come from China.

1905

In 1905 Karate was included in the physical education curriculum of Okinawa's intermediate schools (junior high). The ideographs (Tode) were standard in Okinawa at this time. In 1905 the Okinawa Master Chomo Hanagi first used the other (Karate) ideograph for his book Karate Soshu Hen.

Meeting in 1936

In 1936 Ryukyu Shimpo, an Okinawan newspaper, sponsored a meeting of Okinawan Karate masters to discuss the status of Karate in Okinawa. Yabu, Kiyamu, Motobu, Miyagi, and Hanagi were invited to Naha, the capital city of Okinawa and also the "Mecca" of the Karate world. In this meeting, the unification of writing was discussed and it was decided to change the name of the art to "Karate" meaning "empty hand".

Reasons For This Change

- 1. They would establish the new origin. They believed Okinawan fighting arts could be independent from China even though they recognized that great influence by China that existed.*
- 2. The new ideograph also represented the meaning of "Mu" "Ku" which has a stronger association with Zen philosophy than the old.*
- 3. This was the art of fighting methods using no weapons but only the "empty hand".*

Standardization

After the meeting, the letter was standardized and has remained unchanged to the present day. The ideograph was used occasionally by people who were reluctant to use changes even in the early 1960's.

The Beginnings In India

According to legend, in the sixth century A.D., the Indian monk Daruma journeyed from India to China to teach the Liang dynasty monarch the tenets of Zen Buddhism. To endure this arduous journey, Daruma developed the physical and mental powers for which he was later renowned. After delivering the tenets of Buddhism, Daruma remained in China, staying in Shaolin Sze where he taught Buddhism to the Chinese monks. Here he became famous for teaching standards of Buddhism that were very strict physically as well as spiritually.

Although there are many stylistic similarities in the fighting arts of India and China, there is no solid evidence that the Chinese fighting arts came from India

as is told in legends. There are Chinese texts documenting the existence of several Chinese martial art forms prior to Daruma's journey in the 6th century.

I merely wish to affirm that the organized origins of Karate came into being during this time period, and that no known record either verifies or denies this contention.

The Chinese Influence

"Although the goal of Buddhism is the salvation of the soul, the body and soul cannot be separated. In weak physical condition one will never be able to perform the rigorous training necessary to attain true enlightenment." So Daruma taught student monks Icchin which is regarded as the tool through which is necessary rigorous physical and mental training may be endured.

As a corollary of Daruma's training, the monks at the Shaolin Temple won the reputation of being the best fighters in China.

What is the purpose of Karate?

The primary purpose is to be a better citizen. To learn self defense, to gain confidence, focus, and self discipline. As said by Gichin Funakoshi, "The acquisition of the art of being a good and honest member of society."

Karate Belt Colours:

Karate belt colors show the skill level of the student. White means he or she is pure and they do not know what it takes to practice karate. The orange belt means they have been taught the basic principles and has a stable form. The blue belt means they are able to adapt to any situation. The blue belt is given when the student learns to control his or her center of gravity. When a student has become creative with the art they are then awarded the brown belt. After a student shows mastery of the art of karate he or she is awarded the black belt.