History of Karate

THE BEGINIINGS 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.

Ch'Uen Yuan

Most Chan Fa systems are descendants of the one hundred-seventy hand and foot positions of Ch' Uen Yuan and they can be traced back to Bodhidharma's influence.

Branching Out

The Shaolin Chan Fa is listed as one of nine Wai Cha (external schools) of fighting systems and is regarded to be the first established system in China.

1. Shaolin Chan Fa, Sui period or before
2. Hung Chuan, Sung period (1127-1279)
3. Tau Tei Yu Tan Tui, Sung period
4. Hon Chaun, Ming period (1368-1644)
5. Erh-Lang Men, Ming period
6. Fan Chuan, Ming period
7. Cha Chuan, Ming period
8. Mi Tsung Yum, Ching period(1699-1911)
9. Pa Chuan, Ching period

In comparison there were the Nei Cha (internal schools), all from the Sung or post Sung Dynasties.

1. Wu Tang Pai
2. Tai Chi Chuan
3. Pa Kua Chaun
4. Hsin Yi Chua
5. Tzu Fan Men
6. Liu He Pa Fa

JAPAN

Sumo is perhaps the oldest known form or system of weaponless fighting in Japan and dates back beyond the mythological era (before 500 A.D.). The earliest legends tell of two god figures, Takeminakata No Kami and Takemikazuchi No Kami, who engaged in power contests. Another story relates the wrestling contests between Nomino Sikune No Mikoto and Taima NoKehaya. These contests are known to be the first between demi-gods and similar mythological beings.

In 607, during the Sui Dynasty, the first official Japanese ambassador was sent to China, and this exchange was maintained through the T'ang Dynasty. During this time Chinese influence flourished in Japan, and it is believed that Chan Fa was introduced along with many other things of Chinese origin.

Many forms of martial arts already existed in Japan during this time period which might carry the influence of Chan Fa in their fighting styles. However, these Chan Fa systems were never developed by the Japanese martial artists of the day. This lack of development was due to the structure of Japanese society. At that time, there was a very strong status system in Japan much like the caste system in India, and only the members of the samurai class were allowed to use weapons for fighting or train in the martial arts.

The samurai were respected because they protected the commoners. They were expected to behave in a respectful and courageous manner.. Through strong government control, the role of the samurai became a sacred trust, carrying "this burden of pride." Being a member of the samurai class meant lifelong employment unless a samurai was found guilty of wrong doing. In that case, he and his family would lose their jobs permanently.

Samurai constantly practiced weaponry to better themselves and had time for little else. It is easy to see how weaponless fighting systems developed at that time would never gain enough popularity to be properly recognized. Even so, some forms of martial arts were developed like Torite and Ashikeri, and later Yawara and Jujitsu did exist among the lower class police forces. An interesting note is the similarities in the weapons (kobudo) developed in Japan and in Okinawa during this time period.

Early Stages

During the Sui and Tang Dynasties, many Japanese and Chinese representatives traveled with relative freedom between the two countries. This is also when Buddhism came to Japan and gained popularity. Interestingly, during the Heian period between 794-1184, many Buddhist monks were well trained in fighting methods and were used to maintain local law and order. Many became security guards for wealthy individuals in Kyoto. The popularity of Buddism made some temples so powerful that they became involved in many political upheavals. And because of the popularity of Buddism, the monks were untouchable by either the samurai or the government. Many temples became independent and secretive in their administration of religious matters due to the political intrigues.

This is believed to be the time when many martial arts developed in Japan. Wars and battles were still decided by the samurai, but the art of fighting systems was practiced and developed by the Buddhist monks.

Toyotomi Hideyoshi

In 1592, this great general decided to fulfill his dream of conquering the world. He had conquered Japan and sought to continue his quest by marching on to China. Many of his generals were against this plan, and it soon proved to be a disaster as the Japanese faced too many disadvantages. Ships were not powerful enough, the climate was against them, the generals in Korea were not familiar enough with the terrain to plan strategic advances, and resistance was much stronger than expected. The dream was ended with the death of Hideyoshi in 1598 without a single Japanese soldier ever setting foot on Chinese soil.

The failure of this conquest cost Toyotomi not only his life and his fortune, but also his dynasty. Once again the peace of the entire nation was in shambles. The conflict between the remainder of the Toyotomi clan and the rival clan of Tokugawa Dynasty began and was to last for the next three hundred years.

It is oral history that many warriors came back from the failed conquest of China with some kind of hand-to-hand combat system. But as history has revealed, the warriors reached only Korea and not

Okinawa

The basic form of self-defense are perhaps as old as mankind. The art of Karate as it is widely practiced today can be traced back to Okinawan martial arts systems called "Te", meaning "hand". Te later was renamed Tode, the name it held before it became known as Karate. the Japanese used the name "kempo", which means "fist way", and the similar term in Chinese is Chan Fa.

Okinawa is the main island of the Ryukyu Islands, located in the East China Sea between Kyushu, Japan and Taiwan. Okinawa has maintained cultural contact for centuries with both China and Japan. Through a constant influence of Chinese sailors and merchants, the indigenous Okinawan fighting forms were heavily influenced by Chan Fa. Because of its strategic location, Okinawa was invaded several times by both China and Japan. Each country sought to use okinawa as a military and diplomatic base. With these two powerful countries vying for control, it is not surprising that the Okinawan people developed high levels of proficiency in self-defense.

Okinawans have long been known as fierce fighters, and the tragic battles of World War II proved to the world that the Okinawans would rather die than live in disgrace. The spirit of the samurai was well developed in the hearts of these people.

The Legendary Sakugawa

In 1724, a man named Sakugawa journeyed to China from his home in Shuri, Okinawa. He was gone for many years, and his friends and relatives thought him lost or dead. One day to everyone's surprise, Sakugawa returned home a much changed man. He possessed a mysterious physical strength and a complex form of Chan Fa. Soon many people wanted to become his students. This was the start of the Sakugawa style of Karate.

Thirty Six Families

The emperor of China sent Okinawa an imperial gift of skilled artisans and merchants. These people soon formed into a community known as the Thirty-Six Families. This community was responsible for the rapid spread of Chan Fa throughout Okinawa. It should be noted that "thirty-six" often means "a great many" and may not mean thirty-six numerically.

Chinese Numbering

One: Whole, absolute, first
Two: Pair, comparison, front and back, top and bottom, etc.
Three: Sanchin, top-middle-bottom, fate, Mother Nature
Four: Directions, square, objects
Eight: Multiple directions, many, plenty
Thirty-Six: Great many

Sho Hassi

In 1429, Sho Hassi united the kingdom of Okinawa under his rule and renamed North and South. During the era of his grandson Sho Shin, the policy of "Bunji-Kokka", or government by culture not military force, was put into effect. At this time all weapons were banned except for those used by military forces. The objective was to restore peace and to disarm rival clans.

Civil War In Japan And The Satsuma

After Toyotomi died, Japan was split into two massive forces. One force was the remainder of the Toyotomi clan from the West and the other was controlled by the new leader Tokugawa from the East. In 1600, these two powers met head-to-head at Sekigahara Field to decide the control of Japan. Although most of the Western generals and the Satsuma clan controlled most of Kyushu joined the Toyotomi, the Tokugawa forces won.

Tokugawa allowed the Satsuma-Shimazu family to retain their territories under the edict of unconditional loyalty to Tokugawa. The reason he allowed the Shimazu family to keep their lands was that they were so powerful that trying to destroy them might have proven self-defeating and was not in the best interest of Tokugawa. So instead Tokugawa took the Shimazu family as his allies and sent them to punish Okinawa for refusing to send supplies during the Japan-China war of 1592. It was also a useful way to smooth the honor of the frustrated Satsuma warriors by giving them a new target while keeping them too busy to make any further plays against Tokugawa.

A Ban On All Weapons

Upon seizing control of Okinawa, the Shimazu clan instituted numerous rules of martial law, one of which was a ban on all weapons. This time, however, the ban was on a much larger scale than that instituted by Sho-Shin. Only the Satsuma samurai, who were the invaders and conquerors of Okinawa, were allowed to have weapons.

The methods used by the Satsuma for enforcing the weapons ban were ruthless. Any weapons found in an Okinawan's possession were immediately confiscated and the owner was severely punished. As part of the ban, the Shimazu also prohibited the Okinawans from participating in the study or practice of the martial arts.

This ban had a number of serious effects on the Okinawan martial arts. All study and participation was forced underground, and all teaching was done by word of mouth only. No written records exist which would allow us to trace the development of the Okinawan arts during this time period. This has led to the creation of many false legends due to the inability to document facts.

Secrecy became such an obsession that instructors hid true techniques from rival schools, as in the changing or hiding of moves in kata. this eventually led to the development of new and unique fighting techniques and systems including the

modification of farming and work tools into weapons for combat use. The fighting attitudes in the martial arts schools became very violent due to the suppression of civil liberties and the general sentiment of the times.

And above all, the ban made Karate one of the most practical and effective hand-to-hand combat systems ever developed. The need for practical application kept Karate from degenerating to a mostly theoretical art or a simple or obscure form of exercise.

The Secret Revealed

It is impossible to pinpoint when the secrets of Karate began to be revealed long after rules were changed. However, there was a gradual but steady unveiling and interaction of this magnificent art. Luckily, some schools were not as attached to secrecy as others, and slowly the major schools of Karate became less suspicious and more open. Officially, the Satsuma's control ended in 1875, but Karate did not become popular or even well known as being an Okinawan art until around 1903.

Intense rivalry within Karate schools did not help to promote the discovery of the art. Karate, primarily developed to maim or kill opponents, was no longer needed in actual combat as conquering Satsuma samurai had departed for Japan.