

History of Traditional Karate

The precise history of Traditional Karate is almost impossible to verify due to the secrecy surrounding the art and the lack of written records. It is known that the martial arts of Okinawa and Japan were influenced in the development of their martial arts by various Chinese sources. It is also clear that at least one source of influence on Chinese martial arts came from India.

In Okinawa, Chinese Kempo was combined with the native form of fighting to develop Okinawa-te, or Karate. One important factor in the development of Okinawan fighting methods was the advent of repressive rulers. Between 1477 and 1526 Okinawa was ruled by King Sho Shin who banned the ownership of weapons. In 1690 Japan's Satsuma clan came to power and continued the ban. The various schools of fighting practiced in secret, so as not to be observed by the rulers, and in deadly earnest.

Karate up to the end of the 19th century had been transmitted as a secret fighting method that could be used in the place of weapons. In 1922 Gichin Funakoshi introduced Karate to Japan. Karate was analyzed, polished and changed more into an art than merely a method of fighting. More emphasis was placed upon Karate's spiritual aspects for control of one's physical and emotional abilities. Karate's ultimate meaning is the perfection of one's character through vigorous and serious training. At this time various schools (or styles) of karate were formed, based on the original Okinawan teaching methods.

In 1955, the Japan Karate Association was formed to further the study and practice of Karate throughout Japan. Since then, Traditional Karate has been spread throughout the world by direct and indirect students of Master Funakoshi, and of the founders of other Karate schools.

Traditional Karate as practiced today is an art, a sport and a proven method of self defense. Traditional Karate uses only the human body as the weapon of self defense. The word Karate means "empty hand". The word "empty" carries the connotation from Zen philosophy "to render oneself empty", to achieve a state of psychological awareness without the distraction of emotions such as fear, anxiety, or anger.

In Japanese, Traditional Karate practitioners are called *karateka* and the martial arts contests are called *shiai*, which means "test each other". It differs significantly from the usual idea of sports competition. *Shiai* means to test one's personal level of attainment through the use of mutual engagement.

Victory itself is not the ultimate objective of the Traditional Karate contest, which is but one of the many methods of Karate training. It is a means for the student to test his or her ability by entering into a serious combat situation governed by strictly established rules of conduct. The Traditional Karate competition rules, as established by Sensei Nishiyama, are geared towards helping the *karateka* improve their training.



Gichin Funakoshi, founder of Shotokan