History of Karate



Like most other modern martial arts Karate has grown and evolved from various influences over hundreds of years and yet some fundamental elements stay the same. Part of the enjoyment of karate is learning about its rich heritage and interesting past. It is said that karate was first derived from the fighting style taught to Shao Lin monks in India from where it travelled to China and then to the Okinawan islands of Japan. Karate was then brought to mainland Japan by 'the father of modern karate', Gichin Funakoshi.

Today, karate is a martial art practiced not only in Japan but all over the world. Before Gichin Funakoshi, karate was only a regional art of Okinawa and was transmitted from masters to their followers personally.

Funakoshi's story is very similar to that of many greats in karate. He began as a weakling, sickly and in poor health, whose parents brought him to Itosu for his karte training. Between his doctor, Tokashiki, who prescribed certain herbs that would strengthen him, and Itosu's good instruction, Funakoshi soon blossomed. He became a good student, and with Asato, Arakaki and Matsumura as his other teachers, expertise and his highly disciplined mind.

When he finally came to Japan from Okinawa in 1922, he stayed among his own people at the prefectural students's dormitory at Suidobata, Tokyo. He lived in a small room alongside the entrance and would clean the dormitory during the day when the students were in their classes. At night, he would teach them karate.

When the Yashiro Fleet visited Okinawa from the main islands of Japan, selected sailors practiced karate under the direction of Gichin. Since the art was so powerful, the Navy decided to not adopt the art.

In March 1921, when Emperor Hirohito was still the Crown Prince, he visited Okinawa en-route to a visit to Europe. Gichin Funakoshi led a public performance of karate, which was performed by selected students at the Grand Hall of Shuri Castle, in front of the Crown Prince.

In May 1922, Gichin attended the First Budo and Physical Education Exhibition sponsored by the Ministry of Education at the request of the Department of Education of Okinawa Prefecture, and demonstrated Okinawa's art of self defence "karate". This was the first performance in the main islands of Japan where Gichin demonstrated.

In 1924, he changed the name " (Chinese hands)" to " (empty hands) and "karate-jutsu (karate techniques)" to "karate-do (karate way)".

Shotokan Nijukun

Gichin wrote the twenty lessons of karate to show the attitudes that people must have to learn karate and the philosophy of life for karate trainees: