

History of Kenpo

A person proficient in this art can easily handle several men, or produce nicely shaped halves out of solid bricks, with the bare hand. Yet no one can actually imagine the deadliness, the speed, or the incredible power of KENPO KARATE without a demonstration. Once observed it will be unanimously agreed that the effectiveness of KENPO KARATE is the speed and power with which manoeuvres are executed with most techniques being measured in fractions of seconds.

The exact history of KENPO KARATE has been lost in the antiquity of time, and consequently no definite date can be established as to when it actually started. The only definite link we have are a few writings. But, even then, we cannot tell how many writings have been destroyed, or how many happenings have never been recorded. Nor can we ascertain the truthfulness of the existing records. Bits of information seem to indicate that KENPO KARATE may have been practised in India and China as long as five thousand years ago. But, other records seem to link KENPO KARATE even back to the time of the Egyptian Empire.

Although the true origin of Kenpo is obscure, credit has been given Daruma, the twenty-eighth Buddha from India. When Daruma emigrated to China about the year 525 A.D., armed marauders were playing havoc with their helpless victims. These marauders resulted from the fall of the Han dynasty (202B.C.-220A.D.). During this Dark Age period, the public realized that they were no match for swords and maces. Thus, Daruma declared that parts of the body were to be hardened and developed into weapons. He may have called upon some long forgotten self defence form, we cannot say, for the writings are not that complete, but we do know that he taught his system of self defence known then as Go-shinjutsu. His system applied the mental concentration of Zen meditation (a deep form of Buddhist meditation similar to yoga) to the self defence arts of the open hand. The underlying principles of Go-shinjutsu were the preservation of human rights which insured and promoted peace and happiness. Because Daruma was a stern believer of peace, he decreed that each man had the right to protect himself, so he made the following proclamation:

"War and killing are wrong, but so is it wrong not to be prepared to defend one's self. They have taken our weapons but we have our bodies. We have no knives, so make every fist unto a mace. Without spears every arm must be unto a spear and every open hand a sword."

Daruma's Go-shinjutsu established the foundation for the development of the Chinese Karate, known a little later as Kenpo.

Because of the geographic locations of India, China, Formosa, Korea, Okinawa, Japan and surrounding areas, it would be natural to assume that there was an interchange of ideas and principles among these countries. From China, Kenpo soon spread to these areas. However, Kenpo was never practised unless national defence induced them to protect themselves.

Originally, the Okinawan form of Kenpo primarily utilized the fists. The Chinese Kenpo form used the open hand. In Formosa, Kenpo consisted mostly of poking and thrusting with the fingers. The Southern Islands beyond Formosa, concentrated their efforts on kicking. According to the oldest written records of Japan, Kenpo was introduced there by Kosokun of China about two hundred years ago, but unfortunately, it enjoyed little fame.

The exact form of Kenpo practised at that time is quite vague, although it was referred to as Kumiai Jitsu (the tackling art).

Other records date even further back to the time of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

During this period a Chinese priest named Chin Gen Pin, or Chuen Yuan Pin, (1644-48, or 1627) was believed to be the first to introduce the art of Kenpo to Japan. Since its introduction, it has been a popular belief that Chinese Kenpo gave rise to Japanese Jujitsu. However, contrary to this belief, Chinese Kenpo and Japanese Jujitsu is quite different, although some knowledge of Kenpo did give stimulus to the progress of Jujitsu. The art of Kenpo brought by Chen Cen Pin consisted mainly of kicking and striking.

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During the T'ang period (618-906 A.D.), Chinese Kenpo was renamed Tode, and the Okinawan Kenpo (prior to the years 1901 and 1902) was called "te", meaning hands.

Okinawan history records a great sovereign named Sho-Ha-Shi, who controlled Okinawa under one entity, about five hundred years ago. During his reign, he ruled the government with the sole purpose of establishing a cultural country, and so prohibited the carrying of arms. In the year 1609, Shimazu, a Japanese feudal lord, under the influence of the rulers of Satsuma province of Japan, attacked Okinawa, and took it into his possession. He then clamped an even firmer restriction on the use of weapons by the Okinawan natives to prevent retaliation. Thus, the Okinawans were forced to practice their martial art of "te" in secret. This was the golden period which brought about an upsurge in the advancement of this martial art.

Through their efforts and practice, many improvements developed, which eventually brought about the art of Karate. However it was not until 1902 that Okinawa began to openly teach Karate to the general public. Up to that time Karate was reserved for only the upper class of people.

Because "te" was practised in many different towns, the name of each town preceded the word "te" in order to distinguish their individual style of "te". Nationally, they referred to their martial art as Okinawa-te. As a salute to the Chinese T'ang dynasty during which the empty hand arts flourished, the Okinawans then named their martial art "karate".

In 1924, Gichin Funakoshi introduced Karate to Japan and established a teaching centre in Tokyo. After its introduction by Funakoshi, many other Okinawan Karate men followed him, spreading Karate outside of the confines of Tokyo. By 1930 almost every school in Japan had a Karate department.

Karate's height of popularity grew during the era of Japan's military expansion and lasted up to the end of World War II. Because of its lethal qualities and its adoption by the former Japanese Military, Karate was officially banned, August 11, 1951, by a special Occupational directive.

However, after Japan regained its status with the United States, the ban on Karate was lifted and the art has since been revived.

In the thirty odd years since its introduction into Japan, Karate techniques have been modified and improved, with many Judo holds being incorporated into the art. Compared to Japan's national sport of Judo, Karate is still an obscure art, but judging from the rapid increase of Karate schools that are spreading throughout Japan and Hawaii, it is fast developing into a major sport.

In China, the term Kung Fu, or also know as Gung Fu, is now used to describe their ancient empty hand art, In essence, their art is divided into two major forms, the hard form and the soft form. Although in performance, both forms resemble a classical dance, with graceful and alert movements, the soft form is used more to discourage an opponent by forcing him off balance. The hard form, on the other hand, is used primarily to cause immediate injury. Through my study and association with the Chinese Kung Fu men, it is without question that Karate is a variation of the hard Kung Fu form.

Originally, the Okinawan connotation of "kara" was China, but has since taken the Japanese work "kara" meaning "empty".

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Though Kung Fu is divided into two major forms, there are many variations of these forms, with each borrowing from the other. Some schools in China place great emphasis upon the use of their fingers when applying their techniques, while other place emphasis on the knuckles or feet. This is also found to be true in many schools of Karate today. However, whatever the differences are, the forms are still similar in context, and are only distinguished from each other by a few individual features.

As the orientals emigrated to Hawaii, they brought with them these same empty hand arts. Like other countries, after its introduction, improvements and modifications soon developed. The leading modifier in the Hawaiian Island is Professor William K.S. Chow. Realizing that Americans fight differently, in comparison with the oriental, he has revised many of the old techniques and has also added a few individual features of his own. It was under Professor Chow that he obtained his Black Belt. Since leaving his native land he has brought the art of KENPO KARATE to the United States to complete the journey.

Mr. Ed Parker was one of America's foremost Karate pioneers. He opened his first studio in Provo, Utah (1954) while attending Brigham Young University when he obtained a B.S. Degree in Sociology and Psychology. Upon graduating B.Y.U. he moved to Pasadena, California where he opened his second school in 1956. Over the years Kenpo Karate has grown both in the USA, Europe and more recently in Canada. Over the years Kenpo Karate has grown both in the USA, Europe and more recently in Canada. The organization was known as the I.K.K.A. (International Kenpo Karate Association). After the passing of Mr. Parker on December 15, 1990, the remaining Executive Board of Directors, Mr. Joe Palanzo, Mr. Richard (Huk) Palanis and Mr. Frank Trejo formed a new organization in which to preserve and carry on into the 21st Century called the W.K.K.A. (Worldwide Kenpo Karate Association). Mr Joe Palanzo was nominated President since he had been operating on Ed Parker's Kenpo Karate franchised studio since 1970, although his instruction with the late great Mr. Parker dates back to 1964. In January 1996 Mr. Palanzo was promoted to 10th degree black belt (Senior Grandmaster) by the board of directors.

In January 1995 Mr. Stewart sought out and travelled to Baltimore, Maryland to become affiliated with the organization and to become a personal student under Mr. Palanzo. Since that time Mr. Stewart has become the Canadian Representative for the W.K.K.A. and is a member of the Worldwide Kenpo Karate National Demonstration Team. He travels regularly to Baltimore to take private lessons with Mr. Palanzo as well as attending various Kenpo Karate seminars to assist in teaching while continuing his Martial Arts studies. Every August Mr. Stewart holds his annual Canadian Kenpo Karate Kamp where instructors and students travel from Canada and the USA to participate and gain knowledge of the most lethal Martial Arts of our time. In October 1997 Mr. Stewart was promoted to 5th Degree Black Belt (Associate Professor) by Mr. Palanzo and the Board of Directors. Mr. Stewart is the highest ranked legitimate Second Generation Kenpo WKKKA Instructor in Canada.