

Karate-do Gairyaku (General Explanation of Karate)
by Chojun Miyagi

Remarks: Chojun Miyagi Sensei wrote this article for a lecture in Osaka on May 28, 1936 and it was translated by Toshio Tamano and others under the direction of Seikichi Togushi

What Is Karate?

Karate is an art which cultivates courage and develops physical and mental health through its practice. In addition, karate training enables the individual to defend himself against physical aggression without reliance upon weapons. It is also possible, however, to use certain tools or instruments in one's defense depending on the circumstances.

People often see the breaking of many thick boards or the smashing of several roof tiles with the bare fist and mistake these feats for the true purpose of karate training. This technique is only a minor one. For just as in any other martial art, the essence of karate training is the eventual attainment of enlightenment.

History of Ryukyu Kempo (Karate-do)

The name karate is a special term in Okinawa, and if we look for its origin, we find it can be traced back to Chinese boxing. Due to the lack of literature on the subject, the birthplace of Chinese boxing cannot be definitely established. According to one theory, it originated in Turkey and the Middle East with the rise of civilization and slowly spread to India and China. There are, however, many theories. It is said that Chinese boxing was already in existence about 5,000 years ago during the K'ou Dynasty, which built a great civilization along the basin of the Yellow River. In any case, Chinese boxing belongs to ancient times, and it is not hard to imagine that it came from man's fighting or competitive nature.

Traditional branches of Chinese boxing were all designed to imitate the fighting movements of animals and birds. This is evident from the fact the different styles have the names tiger, lion, monkey and crane. Later, Chinese boxing was divided into the southern and northern forms. Furthermore, both styles branched out into two types of boxing: naika kempo (internal family boxing) and gaika kempo (external family boxing). The main characteristic in naika kempo was its softness. Buto kempo represents naika kempo. The main characteristic of gaika kempo is hardness. Shorinji kempo (Shaolin Temple boxing) was typical of gaika kempo. In the Tou and Sou dynasties, there was a golden era of Chinese boxing in which many great martial artists appeared.

How was Chinese boxing introduced to the Ryukyu islands? There is no definitive historical evidence, but there are many theories. The three main theories are:

1. The 36 men theory. This theory asserts that in 1392, Chinese men came to the Ryukyu islands and introduced Chinese boxing to the Ryukyu people.

2. The Oshima Note theory. In 1762, a Ryukyu ship bound for mainland Japan was forced ashore by a storm at Oshin Tosa, a province of Shikoku island. Among the crew was an intellectual named Shiohira Pechin Seisei, who told about the Ryukyu Islands and their people to a new scholar of Tosa Province, Choki Tobe. The latter recognized the conversation in a notebook which was titled Oshima Hikki (Oshima Note). In the third volume of the Oshima Note, a section of gossip entitled "Skillful boxer" relates that a Chinese boxer by the name of Kusanku traveled the Ryukyu Islands with his students and practiced what was at that time, called kumiai-/utsu (combat techniques) This book, then, contains some of the most reliable literature about the origins of karate in the Ryukyu Islands.

3. The after Keicho theory. In the year Keicho 14(1609), the Satsuma Clan conquered the Ryukyu Islands and established a regime based on brutal repression. Official policy prohibited ownership or use of weapons. One theory has it that for lack of a better means of protection, the art of karate developed naturally among the defenseless Okinawans. Another theory asserts it was during this time of crisis that karate was actually introduced. One thing is certain: a martial art combining the foreign-introduced boxing and the native te (hand) style developed rapidly under the unique circumstances of the times.

There are several other theories, but they are popular versions that are not very reliable. As we can see, there is no one proven theory, only the fact: karate was evolved from the past into its present form.

The Karate World in the Past

The origin of the name "karate" in Okinawa is uncertain, but it is true that it was named not so very long ago. In the past, it was called te. In those days' karate or te was practiced secretly according to forms which were passed down from the master to only the best and highest student. If there was no qualified student, a form was never passed down and was lost with the passing of the master's generation. As a result of this practice, many forms have disappeared. After the late 19th century, with the advent of many experts and a new teaching method more suited for the times, the old policy of secrecy was abandoned, and training was conducted in the open.

Gradually, karate was recognized by the public, and for the first time there was a ray of hope for karate in the future. Karate was accepted as part of advancing civilization; its physical, educational and cultural values were confirmed. It had completely won public approval.

In 1904, karate was adopted as part of the physical education program in Shuri elementary school. This was the first group instruction in karate history. In April, 1906, karate clubs were established at Okinawan prefectural middle schools, Naha Municipal Commercial High School and Okinawan prefectural school. During the same period, karate clubs were also established in Okinawan agricultural, technical and fishery schools. In 1922, karate was first introduced at the Okinawan police academy and then officially accepted as a regular curriculum subject like other Japanese martial arts such as Judo and kendo. In March, 1926, the Okinawan Karate Club was established. On November 21, 1930, it was assimilated to the Okinawan Athletic Society and

became one of that organization's departments. The Dai-Nippon Butokukai (the Greater Japan Martial Virtues Association) approved karate as one of the Japanese martial arts on December 26, 1933. In mainland Japan, karate clubs were also founded in various schools after 1924.

It is noteworthy to tell of the honorable events which have occurred in the karate world: Hirohito, the present Japanese emperor, then prince, stopped by Okinawa en route to Europe and watched our karate demonstration in the Okinawan teacher's school on March 10, 1921. Also, Prince Chichibu no Miya saw a karate exhibition at the same school in May, 1925, when he stopped in Okinawa on his way to England. In 1930, karate people participated in an exhibition of the Japanese martial arts on the occasion of the opening festival of Meiji Jingu Shrine in Tokyo. In May, 1932, there was also a karate demonstration at the martial arts festival of Saineikan. In April, 1933, Prince Fushi no Miya and Prince Kuni no Miya visited Okinawa by a combined fleet of the Japanese Imperial Navy; we had a great honor to demonstrate karate for them.

Present State of Karate Instruction

According to traditional legends, karate was taught in past mainly as a self-defense art, indicating only slight its content through the slogan: karate ni sente shiai (There is no first offense in karate). But in reality, I now observed the neglect of this kind of spirit constantly. However, with the stream of time, that teaching policy has wrongly improved and now the old erroneous report of the body being main and the mind being next has vanished. Karate training has now reached the stage of having the ares of faith, unity, fist and Zen; that is, mind being main and body being next. This gives hope that karate will receive acclaim of a true martial art.

Qualified people now teaching karate in Japan include:

Okinawa-Kentsu Yabe, Chomo Hanashiro, Chotoku Kyan, Anbun Tokuda, Chohatsu Kyoda, Choshin Chibana, Jinsei Kamiya, Shinpan Gusukuma, Seko Higa, Kamato Nakasone, Jinan Shinsato, Chojun Miyagi.

Outside Okinawa-Gichin Funakoshi, Choki Motobu, Kenwa Mabuni, Masaru Sawayama, Sanyu Sakai, Moden Yabiku, Nisaburo Niki, Koyu Konishi, Shinji Sato, Mizuho Mutsu, Kamesuke Higaonna, Shinjun Otsuka, Ryoshin Taira, Koki Gusukuma, Kanbun Uechi

About Karate Styles

Presently there are many who theorize about styles of ryukyu karate, but they are all without firm research and almost all of their claims are vague speculations. It seems like fumbling in the dark. One of the popular theories states that there are shorin-ryu and shorei-ryu karate, the former suitable for fat people with large physiques, the latter suitable for people with small physiques and slight physical strength, people who are as thin as a willow tree. However, the only theory in which we can trust is that, in the year Bunsei 11(1879), Chinese fukien style was brought to Okinawa (by Kanryo Higashionna) and became goju-ryu karate boxing after continued improvement. The group which is heir to that legitimacy still exists with regular succession on Okinawa today.

Characteristics of Karate

- The advantages of karate are as follows:
- It can be practiced in a small space.
- It can be practiced alone or In a group.
- It does not take a long time to practice.
- It can be practiced according to body strength, choosing appropriate forms regardless of sex and age.
- It can be performed with simple utensils which do no quire great expense or can be conducted while empty handed.
- It is effective as a means of exercise for maintaining robust health.
- As a result of mind and body training, it can build an indomitable spirit.

Future of Karate-Do

The era of secrecy in karate-jutsu (art of karate) is already gone, and the time for public training in karate (way of karate) has come. However, the method of this approach is still unformed. We should stop calling karate secret martial art which has been hidden in the small world of the Ryukyu islands. Karate should be open to the public and should ask for criticism and study by all martial artists. Also in the future, hope for the completion of the long term task of providing protective equipment for competition. I strongly feel karate must reach the stage of being able to compete at the same level as other martial arts and join the general Japanese martial arts.

At the present time, deep interest is nationally shown toward karate-do. The enthusiastic study of karate has sprung all over Japan: in Tokyo and Osaka especially and from the north of Hokkaido to southern Taiwan (then occupied by Japan). There are also tendencies among the martial artists to study karate competitively.

Karate enthusiasm abroad is unexpectedly high. And there is a person who has gone to Europe to advertise karate-do and devote himself to its study after graduating from a university in Tokyo. Furthermore, karate enthusiasm in Hawaii is extremely vigorous. And in May, 1935, at the invitation of residing influential people and a newspaper company, I went there to spread and develop karate. Already we are witnessing the establishment of study circles on many of the Hawaiian Islands. As I have stated, karate-do has already reached the state of flourishing and developing from a martial art peculiar to Japan to a worldwide martial art.

Methods of Karate Instruction

The development of man's muscles is varied according to the way in which they are used. Because of this, in the beginning of each karate session, one should do warm-up exercises to prepare and develop the muscles so that it will be easier to do karate movements. Next, one should be taught the basic forms, complementary exercises, open-hand forms (classical kata) and kumite(sparring) exercises, in that order. Following is the general explanation of this method:

1. Preparation exercises. Exercise various parts of the body to soften the muscles and, at the same time, to develop strength and durability. These exercises lead to the understanding of karate's basic forms of sanchin, tensho and naihanchin. Then, after practicing other forms, perform the exercises again to relax the muscles, and rest quietly by doing the breathing exercises

2. Kihon kata (basic forms). Sanchin, tensho and naihanchin are all basic forms, their object to develop a strong build and martial art spirit by harmonizing the breath and the power in a correct posture.

3. Complementary exercises. These are exercises designed to help the student learn forms better, since the movements are the various techniques taken from kata (forms). These are done with many kinds of equipment to develop the body strength and muscles necessary for karate techniques.

4. Kaishu kata (advanced forms). There are between 20 and 30 kinds of these forms. Many named according to their originators. Kata consist of many gymnastic movements which various offensive and defensive techniques that are arranged harmoniously. The movements allow the student to understand the relationship between spirit and body, since forms are designed to develop them effectively.

5. Kumite (sparring exercises). After having mastered several kata, the student should study the true meaning of the forms' movements and then proceed to apply those techniques in sparring exercises as if he is in an actual fighting situation.

In summation, the teaching method of karate is designed to cultivate a good martial art spirit through practicing the materials such as kihon kata (sanchin, tensho and naihanchin), kaishu kata. and kumite exercises.