

MARTIAL ARTS OF THE ORIENT

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China: The Art of Wu Shu

CHINA

China has one of the largest land masses of any country in the present day world, with its borders encompassing 3,691,500 square miles. It's population out numbers even the Soviet Union at nearly one billion people, giving China the largest population in the world. Chinese history dates back some 3000 years, making it one of the oldest countries in existence today. Intertwined within 3000 years of Chinese history and culture, the origins of Wu Shu can be traced.

Wu Shu, or Kung Fu as it is sometimes also referred to, dates back to about the sixth century after Christ. A Buddhist monk by the name of Bhodidharma is credited with the introduction of the martial arts to other monks in China. Dharma, as he is referred to in Japanese, was in fact Indian, and of nobility. However, for some reason Bhodidharma renounced his birthright, took up the robes of the Buddhist priesthood, and then disappeared for some time. He resurfaced in the Honan province of China, seemingly having crossed the Himalayas on foot. While in this part of Northern China, he gained entrance in the Shaolin Temple in Honan. At this point, researchers find two different reasons for Bhodidharma introducing his 18 exercises, which are the foundation of Wu Shu.

One explanation states that Bhodidharma found the monks in the temple in poor health. In order to improve their physical condition, Bhodidharma taught them 18 therapeutic movements, which eventually came to be known as the 18 Hands of Lo-Han.

Another explanation suggests a more religious reason for the introduction of these movements. Bhodidharma was said to have introduced a new form of Buddhism, which used long periods of static meditation, stressing that enlightenment is to be found within oneself, not in outside objects or people. The monks of this temple were unable to conform to this form of meditation, so Bhodidharma taught them 18 exercises designed to help them with this.

For which ever reason the monks of the Shaolin Temple were taught these 18 movements, it is found in the history records that soon after this practice sessions were set up in the temple. The temple grew to nearly a thousand monks, most of which are recorded as having practiced in the martial art. At one point in Chinese history, the Emperor Kang Hsi called upon the monks for assistance in putting down an uprising. The temple sent a small group of monks who quickly ended the disturbance. After which they returned to their temple and continued with their practice. Not long after this incidence, the warrior monks were called upon again to help the Emperor. This time, however, the Emperor himself saw the monks fight. Seeing the power these monks had developed, the Emperor had them killed for fear that they might turn on him. In the fighting which followed this command, all but five monks were terminated. These remaining five split up, some leaving for other temples, while others stayed behind to rebuild the Shaolin Temple after the death of Emperor Kang Hsi.

These remaining five monks are referred to today as the "Five

Ancestors." They are believed to have given rise to the five Shaolin styles which are in existence today. They are Lau, Hung Gar, Choy, Lai, and Mok. Combinations of these have created endless new styles of the Shaolin Wu Shu. The dispersion of the monks at this time was critical to the spreading of the martial art, for before this time only the Shaolin Temple trained in the martial art.

The styles of Chinese Wu Shu can be divided between two categories: hard and soft styles.

In the hard styles of Wu Shu, the practitioner is taught that force can meet force. Of course in this case the greater force will prevail. The hard styles have introduced blocks and counters so that the weaker of the forces may win in a confrontation. The hard systems of Wu Shu more closely resembles the martial art of karate, in its ideals of training. In the hard styles, great emphasis is placed on limb conditioning. Such things as wooden dummies, steel bars rolled off the wrist into the air and caught by the forearms, and stones used in certain exercises are all used to condition the forearms. Of course, in the modern day world, the adaptation of weights has come into play.

In the soft styles of Wu Shu, another philosophy of force is taken. In this style, the practitioner does not defeat an attack with his force, but rather redirects it using his chi. Chi is defined as the material principle of force, and comes from the Chinese religion Tao. It is felt in the soft styles that a

person can defeat an enemy by using the chi within him, rather than brute muscle power. Therefore, all the movement in the soft styles are smooth and fluid, and emphasis is placed on where the counterstrike occurs rather than the force of it. It has been proved, however, that the incredible powers masters of the soft systems possess, and are said to be derived from their chi, are in fact due to angles of deflection and pressure points in the body.

Japan: Aikido, Jiu Jitsu, and Judo

JAPAN

Japan is a great country, possessing a great many prides. It is one of the largest economic powers in the world today. Technologicly, it has surpassed all the other countries of the world. Over a hundred million people live on the four islands which make up this world power, and have pulled Japan into one of the leading roles of the world without a standing army. Contrary to popular belief, however, Japan did not give the world karate. That feat this nation cannot claim. Jui Jitsu, Aikido, and Judo are three of the main martial arts contributed by Japan.

When one studies the development of martial arts in Japan, it is important to look at the culture during the earlier periods of development. During Japan's fuedual state, the Samuri was the elite noble warrior. The martial arts of this country can be traced in his changing role.

Jiu Jitsu is said to have originated as a means of close in fighting after the sword play of a Samuri battle had proved unsuccessful to either. Although in most cases daggers would have been used in this close fighting, sometimes capturing a person was a better option. For this reason, the Samuri developed a means of finding a weakness in the joints of armour where one could take control of his opponent.

As time continued in Japan, and the country began to pull out of the feudal era, the Samuri was limited more and more until the sword itself was banned from being carried freely. Thus, the art of Jiu Jitsu became more and more popular, and emphasized more.

Eventually, schools for common people wanting to learn this art opened. As this occurred, so did the art change, due to its changing role. No longer was the art used for close in fighting among armed warriors, but now it was an art of unarmed self-defense against an unarmed, or perhaps lightly armed, person.

A large portion of Jiu Jitsu focuses on using an attacker's power against himself. By allowing an attack to maintain its full force by only redirecting it, and adding a little force by the defender, a student of Jiu Jitsu can take control of an opponent. Jiu Jitsu also stresses that all its strikes be atemi strikes, or blows that only go to vital parts of the body. This method of thinking in Jiu Jitsu has created a sometimes bad reputation in the public eye. Jiu Jitsu does stress like other martial arts, though, that its use is for defense only.

Aikido is another Japanese martial art. It was developed after Jiu Jitsu had reached its final transformation into its present day state. A man by the name of Morihei Ueshiba developed this art. Ueshiba was the son of a farmer, and is described as being strong with a deep interest in the martial arts. He was in the Japanese army, and fought in several conflicts and even the Russo-Japanese War. This him allowed to travel and observe many martial arts, until after returning to Japan he began to study Jiu Jitsu. He reached the rank of teacher, and in time became dissatisfied with the teaching of Jiu Jitsu. Ueshiba then changed the art into what has become Aikido, adding the mental side of martial art training that jiu jitsu

lacked in his eyes.

As the founder of Aikido was originally a student of Jiu Jitsu, it is understandable that these two arts are very closely related. Aikido is known for its throws and locks, using an opponents force against him, much like Jiu Jitsu is. Aikido, however, also stresses that the same harmony that is found in the redirection of an attack should be found in life. The "do" in Aikido stresses harmony. The counters in Aikido are also slightly different than those in Jiu Jitsu. The strikes in Aikido are to vital parts of the body, but only intended to weaken an attack enough to take control.

Judo is the sport form of Jiu Jitsu. It was developed by Professor Jigoro Kano in 1882. Professor Kano organized the system so that the throws and locks could be used in a sporting way, rather than to destroy an opponent. The techniques of Judo have been organized and rules of what is considered defeat laid down so that it has become a full sport, much like football or baseball. Judo can be used as an excellent form of self-defense, even though it does not stress death or serious injury to an opponent. In fact, President Theodore Roosevelt studied Judo after watching a demonstration in the White House. He was so impressed that someone the size of the average oriental could throw a 200 hundred pound army sergeant that he and his daughter both earned blackbelts in this art.

Okinawa: Roots of Karate-do

OKINAWA

Three hundred miles south of Japan and four hundred miles east of China there lies a small archipelago called the Ryu Kyu Islands. On an island of only 460 square miles in area exists the beginnings karate. It is here that the Chinese and Japanese originally fought for possession, exchanging culture in the process. Unknown to the majority of the world, it is here that karate began out of necessity.

Karate did not exist before the eighteenth century. The native Okinawan art of te has no records to date its actual beginnings, but it is extremely old, seemingly found remotely in almost all early Okinawan history. With the capture of the Ryu Kyu's in 1609 by the Satsuma clan of Japan, the art of te grew incredibly. Not only in its practitioners, but in form. The weaponless Okinawan's were left with only their instinct to survive, and so te developed. Then in the early 1800's, Sakugawa, a native practitioner of te, journeyed to China, and studied the the Chinese art of Shaolin Wu Shu. This Chinese art combine with te created karate. This history can be traced in the actual characters used to write karate, for the kara can mean either Chinese or empty. However, a translation of empty has become the practice since the growth of karate into a world wide sport.

Karate broke down into three systems in Okinawa. The first, Naha-te, is characterized by sweeping movements of the leg during stepping. Due to the wideness of the stances, and this type of

motion, it is said to be better suited for larger people. Goju-Ryu and Uechi-Ryu are two styles of Naha-te. The second system of karate is Shuri-te. In this system the feet move naturally, stepping with the ball of the foot first. More natural stances are also used in this system. Some examples of this system would be Shobayashi-Ryu, Kobayashi-Ryu, and Matsubayashi-Ryu. The third system of karate is Tomari-te, which is said to be the lost system, for it has disappeared from existence.

Karate went to Japan in 1922, taken by an Okinawan karate man named Funakoshi. Gichin Funakoshi open the first karate dojo outside the island of Okinawa, calling his school Shotokan, which still thrives today. Here he modestly coined the phrase "Karate ni sente nashi", meaning "There is no first attack in karate." This idea has become one of the fundamentals on karate training. To see an attack and beat the first punch with a counter is the ideal method of fighting that every karate-ka would like to be able to reach.

Karate utilizes the fist a great deal, which is gained from the old art of te. Some of the kicks and open-handed techniques are herited from the Chinese art of Shaolin Wu Shu. Karate, however, in its purest form stresses the development of the mind along with the body. Through training the mind, a karate-ka can take better, stronger, control over his body. The sometimes "super human feats" that an experienced karate-ka can do is really a simple power of thought and will. Karate teaches that drive that gives confidence; it teaches that drive that allows a

person to pick his weary, bleeding, aching body and take his guard once more. More than that, though, karate also teaches that this way of thinking is a lesson and ability to be used in all aspects of life.

Korea: The Kicking Style of Tae Kwon Do

KOREA

In ancient times, the peninsula of what is today Korea was divided into three political regions. As is the case in most areas of the world, the smallest was constantly being threatened by the larger. Therefore, an elite army was developed by the Silla Kingdom to defend itself from its larger neighbors. In training this army, the soldiers were given normal military training, and also trained in mind and body by Buddhist monks. Members of the Hwarang-do, as this group became called, volunteered to undergo these hardships until a truly elite army was developed.

Soon the Silla Kingdom succeeded in uniting the rest of the peninsula, and the practices of the Hwarang-do became popular among most of the people. The practices of the Hwarang-do came to be called Tae Kwon Do in time, as its continued popularity flourished.

In the tenth century, the Silla Kingdom was overthrown due to internal conflict. The Koryo dynasty was set up, and Tae Kwon Do was not only encouraged by the government, but made mandatory practice for all over six years of age. However, as time continued new ideas were adopted and anything militaristic was discontinued. Only monks who went into seclusion kept the art alive, and when the Japanese occupied Korea in 1909 the art was purged out even further.

With the end of World War Two, Korea was once again right for the development of a martial art. Those who had kept Tae Kwon Do

and either hid or migrated to another country and back again, revived the art. Once again Tae Kwon Do flourished and spread, gaining world popularity when in 1988 it was included in the Olympic Games.

Tae Kwon Do emphasizes the use of the feet. High and powerful kicks are the norm for this art. Power for the kicks is derived from a thrust of the hips, where in most instances in karate it comes from a twisting motion. The hands are also used in Tae Kwon Do, however not as much as the feet. Most of the hand techniques in this art resembled those found in karate, with the exception of body hooks and uppercuts.

Thailand: Muay Thai

THAILAND

Like other countries of the orient, Thailand too has an old history in which a martial art is present. The Kingdom of Siam, as Thailand was previously called, is known for Muay Thai, or Thai kickboxing. This art is over 2000 years old and was developed as other martial arts were, from conflict. Thailand has always seen trouble from its surrounding countries and a strong military was developed. Here the art of Muay Thai began.

In the thousands of years that Thailand has existed, never has it been conquered by an aggressor for a long period of time. This fact is usually equated to the strong spirit of the people. The Thai are known for their intensity in fighting; for their unbreakable spirits. The art Muay Thai was influenced by the Chinese fighting methods, but later experienced changes in its form and took a new independent path of development. The development of this art from here on is clouded in mystery. Some techniques seen in Thai kickboxing are not found anywhere else in the world.

Present day Muay Thai utilizes the hand, foot, elbow, and knee. Power is emphasised in kicks, which are usually delivered with the shin. About 800 training camps are in existence today in Thailand, each training many young boys eager at a chance to make his mark in the boxing ring. In these camps, students are trained hard, doing such activities as kicking banana trees to strengthen the shin, running up to ten miles a day to build stamina, and stretching the legs intensely. No katas are

present in Thai kickboxing, however all the basic techniques used are found in a ritual dance, called the Ram Muay. In Thai kickboxing stamina is one of the most important characteristics a fighter must possess. Muay thai is a full contact sport, much like American boxing is. However, very few practices are limited in the Muay Thai ring, and those that are have only recently been outlawed. In Thailand, Muay Thai interests nearly everyone, with only about five percent of Thai boys not studying the art.

Burma: Burmese Bando

BURMA

The country of Burma is located between two of the largest countries in Asia: China and India. These two cultures have played a large part in the development of Burma's culture, and martial art.

Bando is the Burmese art of self-defense. It arose centuries ago due to conflict in the Indochina area. Because of Burma's geographical location, the influences of China and India were felt in its development. Much was incorporated from India in the early years, and in the later years of development China began to play a more significant role. In more recent years, Thailand and Japan have contributed to Bando. Bando has gained some of its techniques from the Japanese arts of aikido and jiu jitsu, which were specifically introduced during the Second World War. Kicks such as the roundhouse were adopted from Muay Thai, and therefore are delivered with the shin.

The art of Bando is divided into twelve sects, each named for and characteristically following a certain animal. For instance, the cobra is known for its strikes to the vital parts of the body. The other eleven divisions are: bull, bear, deer, eagle, monkey, paddy bird, panther, python, scorpion, tiger, and viper. Although each sect stresses a different idea, they all favor close in fighting, and wait for an opponent to fully initialize an attack before responding. A particular trait of Bando is that unlike karate or aikido, it also includes the use of weapons.

Philippines: Escrima

Philippines

The Pilippino art of escrima is over 500 years old, and it, like many other martial arts, has a history in combat. This art was first introduced to the world in 1521 when the Spanish invaded the Philippines. It was then that the effective fighting methods of this art were first realized. The Spanish banned the art of escrima after taking hold of this country, however they only succeeded in driving it underground. The Philipinos continued to practice this art until the American occupation of the Philippines began in 1898. American relations with the Philipinos were good, and in the Second World War, America found the natives of the Philippines strong allies.

Escrima entails the use of either a baton or bladed weapon. Sometimes these weapons are used in pairs, as is the usual when batons are used. Beginners start by being taught a series of strikes which are practiced with a partner, each time the other striking out. As a rhythm is created and the students increase in proficiency, speed is picked up, until body movements are applied. American issue machetes became quite an effective weapon for the students of escrima during World War Two.

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