

# I.R.C.A Sinkenpokai



## Newsletter February 2015

### History of the Kenpo Style

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Of all the major Martial Arts styles, Kenpo's origin and history are the least understood and the most confusing.

## Kenpo's Cultural Influences

Kenpo is a mixture of five cultures: First and most important, Chinese; second Japanese; followed by Okinawan, Hawaiian (before Hawaii became a state) and American.

**Kenpo** (also written as "**Kempo**") has an extensive history as an evolving martial art that draws its roots as far back as approximately 520 BC. This was when Bodhidharma (the founder of Zen Buddhism) travelled to China from India.

Bodhidharma (also known by the names "Tamo" and "**Daruma**") was a descendant of the original Buddha and was a pivotal character in the early spread of the martial arts. One of his most well-known quotes was:

***"To fall down seven times, to rise eight times, life starts from now."***

When Bodhidharma travelled to China, he found the monks in a state of physical decline and unable to withstand the prolonged periods of meditation. Accordingly, he instituted a series of 18 exercises in an attempt to improve the physical condition of the monks. These exercises (believed to be similar to yoga) became the catalyst for the creation of other physical disciplines used to further the spiritual development of the monks.

In the centuries after Bodhidharma's time, the exercises increasingly took on a martial attitude. The reason for this new approach was probably due to attacks on monasteries by outlaws. It was during one of these attacks that there appeared a man known only as the "begging monk", who used a collection of hand and foot techniques to drive away the attackers. The other monks were very impressed by this display, and requested instruction in this method of self-defence.

The next appreciable contribution occurred in the 16th century when a Shaolin monk, Ch'ueh Yuen, expanded the original 18 exercises to 72. This practice took on a combative theme. Later he left the temple and travelled extensively throughout China in search of other martial art masters in order to further his skills.

News of the fabled art of Kenpo resulted in numerous trips to China by the Japanese and Okinawians. Some people would disappear for many years, presumed dead by their families, only to resurface as a master of Kenpo.

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The evolution of Kenpo in Japan is not well documented, although it is believed a flurry of attention to the art was brought during attempts to conquer China. It is suggested that many Samurai Warriors returning from China, whether during or after the war, brought with them extensive knowledge of Kenpo and throughout the years modified it to include their own arts of Jujutsu and Aikijutsu. It is at this time when the greatest growth of Kenpo takes place in Japan.

The greatest confusion regarding "KENPO" is the origin and meaning of its name. Despite its birth in China, the art we call "KENPO" was passed down through the Mitose family, who studied the original art in China in the 1600's and brought it back to Japan. Since the Mitose family was Japanese, they naturally used the Japanese language rather than the Chinese to describe their family system, which they later named "Kosho-ryu" (Old Pine Tree Style): "Ko" (old) "Sho" (pine tree) "Ryu" (school/style).

continue to this day.

In 1919 a young Hawaiian named James Mitose was sent to Kyushu in Japan to learn his ancestor's art of Kosho Ryu Kempo. After completing his training in Japan, Mitose returned to Hawaii and in 1937 opened the "Official Self-Defence" club in Honolulu where he called his art **Kenpo Jujutsu** . It was here that one of his students, William Chow, studied the art.

William Chow's had previously trained with his Chinese father and therefore, Chow's previous martial arts knowledge had contained many circular and flowing motions [Note: As a generalisation, it can be said that most Japanese and Okinawan martial arts contain mainly linear motion, whereas most Chinese martial arts are characterised by circular motion]. While training with Mitose, Chow saw the value of incorporating both systems and began to modify and further develop the art.

William "Thunderbolt" Chow was not the average martial artist in that he was also a street fighter who liked to test the effectiveness of his skills by making regular visits to Honolulu Chinatown to challenge the Chinese instructors as well as boisterous US military personnel. **He understood that there was no sport in a street fight and trained accordingly.** To differentiate his system from that of Mitose, William Chow called his art **Chinese Kenpo Karate**.

Some suspect that the inclusion of the word "Karate" was simply an advertising scheme, as the term was simply more well-known as a type of martial art. "Karate" simply means "empty hand", denoting a style that does not use artificial weapons to defend an attack. Therefore, "Kenpo Karate" translates as "**Way of the Fist and Empty Hand**". To differentiate themselves from the traditional Japanese and Okinawan Karate styles, both Mitose and Chow introduced the wearing of a black uniform (gi). This was to represent that Kenpo was more of a "war art" than the increasingly sports-oriented

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Karate styles in white uniforms.

One of Chow's most gifted students was a Hawaiian native named **Ed Parker** who was one of only six people to be promoted to Black Belt. Chow imparted in Parker the necessity for change in the Kenpo system to meet the modern needs of the American people. Parker made numerous contributions of innovative concepts and principles. He further refined and defined the techniques of Chinese Kenpo into a format that could be broken down into levels for all students. He called this art **American Kenpo Karate**.

Modern day usage of the terms "Kung-fu" (Chinese Mandarin dialect) or "Gung-fu" (Chinese Cantonese dialect), "Wu-shu" (Military/War Art) and "Kuo-shu" (National Art) to describe the Chinese martial arts has added more confusion. Each of the above names in general describes the same arts.

"Kung-fu" (or "Gung-fu") means disciplined technique, skill, time (that is, a period of time used by a person to do a specific type work), ability or strength -- and is a generic term for exercise. "Kung-fu" is the term used outside of mainland China (most notably the United States) to describe any of the Chinese martial arts.

The original or more proper term is "ch'uan fa" (fist law) or "ch'uan shu" (fist art), Japanese - Ken (fist) Po (law)

One characteristic common to the Oriental languages is their use of the same written characters; however, the way the written characters are pronounced make the spoken language completely different from one country to another, or even from one part of the country to another. China is a classic example, with two major dialects: Mandarin (the official dialect) and Cantonese, plus hundreds of local dialects. It was this type of diversification which led to the development of so many different martial arts styles in China. There are over 300 styles of "Kung-fu" taught in China today.

Originally the martial arts in China were referred to as "Ch'uan-fa" meaning "fist law". The Japanese pronounce these same written characters "KENPO" -- or "KEMPO". In modern usage, "KENPO" spelled with an "N" indicates the original Chinese origin; when spelled with an "M" it indicates its incorporation into the Japanese culture. It was James M. Mitose, whose family moved from Japan to Hawaii, who established the spelling of "KeNpo" with an "N" in the art we teach and call "KENPO". The original art taught by Mitose in Hawaii was called "Kenpo Jiu-jitsu." Mitose (pronounced me-toe-see) wrote several books on the subject of Kenpo Jiu-jitsu.

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Kenpo has been described many ways, but the term "Kenpo Karate", using the original Chinese characters, is the most authentic and clear description of our style -- also distinguishing it as completely different from the Japanese and Okinawan written characters (kanji) which define Karate as "empty hand(s)".

The actual word "Karate" is a "homonym": a word with the same pronunciation as another but with a different meaning, origin, and usually spelling. When written in its original form, (the one we use) it means "China Hands" or "T'ang Hands" (pronounced "tong" - remember, "Tang is a breakfast drink") referring to the "T'ang Dynasty" (618 - 960 A.D.) or -- more literally -- China.

The second meaning -- the one used by the Japanese and Okinawans is "Karate" : "Kara" (empty) "Te" (hand). In 1923 the Okinawan Masters changed the Chinese character from T'ang (China) to the Japanese (Kanji) for "empty" because the martial arts now taught in Okinawa were no longer purely Chinese in nature -- over the years they had been combined with the original "Okinawa Te", or "Bushi No Te" ["warrior's hand(s)"] to form a new style. This became the father of all modern Okinawan and Japanese Karate, reflecting the changes they had made.

Although the term "Karate" usually denotes a Japanese/Okinawan style, there was no Karate in Japan until 1923, so by any standards Japan's KARATE is a relatively modern martial art. The KENPO we teach, on the other hand, reflects the original Chinese martial arts passed down from one generation to another for hundreds of years -- a tradition our schools continue to this day.

Kenpo training emphasizes a scientific approach to combat and features techniques influenced by various Chinese, Japanese and Hawaiian arts. Many *kata* are taught, and rapid-fire hand techniques and combinations are often used. The art received a popularity boost after Jeff Speakmann, a student of Ed Parker's, showcased it in the movie *The Perfect Weapon* (1991).

Kenpo is pure intelligence of thought and motion. This is what makes his KENPO system unique, practical, logical, realistic, and applicable. It has often been referred to as the "University of Martial Arts". It employs linear as well as circular moves, utilizing intermittent power when and where needed, interspersed with minor and major moves that flow with continuity. It is flexible in thought and action allowing one to blend with confrontations one may encounter.

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Kenpo is a martial art that teaches self-defence and self-control through three primary methods: self-defense techniques, forms, and sparring. However, Kenpo diverges from traditional Karate in several important respects. Students are encouraged to change and adapt the techniques. Kenpo emphasises vital point attacks using punches, strikes and kicks. Throws are also important in Kenpo.

Self defence techniques help Kenpo students develop their skills by allowing them to practice with different threatening situations and experiment with what-if scenarios. Initially, forms and katas help students to develop mental concentration and mental discipline. As they progress, the forms and katas help them to develop self-awareness and self-expression. Kumite (also known as freestyle or sparring) is an exercise in which students test their skills, self-confidence, and self-control in a friendly competition among other classmates. It gives the opportunity to develop their reflexes and timing in a controlled environment while engaging in a sport activity.

Kenpo also teaches students how to use weapons to increase their understanding of self-defence. In Kenpo, defence against knives and clubs are taught from the yellow belt and up. Weapon training often begins at the green belt level, although some schools restrict it to those of the black belt level and higher.

The Kenpo style strives to maintain a balance between “martial” and “art”. The “martial” aspect is expressed by effective efficient self-defence concepts and techniques. The “art” is expressed by creativity, self-expression and presentation of form.



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