

Overview Of Martial Arts Styles

There are three main categories of martial arts -- Japanese, Chinese, Korean -- and, within each style, there are a few styles.

The goal of this report is to provide an overview of the main categories of martial arts (Japanese, Chinese, Korean) and a brief description of the various martial arts styles within each category.

Although people generally select a martial arts school for reasons other than style (e.g., reputation, location, character-development emphasis, family focus) it's still good to have a general understanding of the martial arts before beginning a search for the best martial arts school for you.

Japanese Martial Arts

The development of martial arts in Japan was marked by some distinctive traits, namely, the influence of the samurai warrior tradition and the geography of Japan itself.

Both the samurai warrior structure and the caste system restricted the use of weapons by members of non-warrior castes. Originally, samurai were expected to be proficient in many weapons, as well as unarmed combat, and attain the highest possible mastery of combat skills. Over time, this purpose gave way to a philosophy of achieving spiritual goals by striving to perfect their martial skills.

This philosophical shift was possible because of Japan's relative isolation. Compared with the rest of the world, Japanese tools of war evolved slowly. This afforded the warrior class the opportunity to study these tools, such as swords, and train in depth. This depth of training led to the development of many different styles and techniques.

Of these Japanese martial arts, the sword fighting martial art of Kendo is the oldest.

There is a distinction today between the traditional arts, which are a continuation of the ancient martial arts, and the modern arts, which focus primarily upon self-

improvement of the practitioner (mental, physical and spiritual), as well as sport and self defense.

The enduring sport of sumo wrestling, which traces its origins to 23 BC, still employs ancient traditions and rituals – the referee is dressed as a Shinto priest, and the competitors engage in ceremonial acts such as throwing salt into the ring. Both reflect the role sumo wrestling had in the Shinto religion.

The main Japanese Martial Arts are jujitsu, aikido, judo and kendo.

*** Jujitsu (a Japanese Martial Art)**

Jujitsu is an ancient martial art that involves grappling techniques (its name translates literally into “the art of pliance.”) It focuses on the ability to use indirect force, such as joint locks or throwing techniques, to defeat an opponent, as opposed to relying upon direct force such as punching or kicking.

While Jujitsu training indeed includes kicking and punching, its focus is to maximize the ability to use an attacker’s force against him and counter-attack where he is weakest or least defended.

Today, jujutsu is practiced in many forms, both ancient and modern. While pure forms of jujitsu are still practiced today, various methods of jujutsu have been incorporated or synthesized into judo and aikido, as well as being exported throughout the world and transformed into sport wrestling systems, and elements of jujitsu have been adopted in whole or part by schools of karate or other unrelated martial arts.

*** Aikido (a Japanese Martial Art)**

This martial art, developed by Morihei Ueshiba of Japan, is a synthesis of the founder’s martial arts studies, philosophy and religious beliefs. It is designed to be an art that can be used as self-defense that does not inflict injury upon the attacker.

The techniques of aikido can, when applied judiciously, divert or immobilize rather than damage or kill. Aikido emphasizes redirecting the attacker's energy, as opposed to meeting force with force.

Aikido consists primarily of body throws and joint-locking techniques. In addition to physical fitness and technique, mental training, controlled relaxation, and development of "spirit" (ki) are emphasized in aikido training.

Ueshiba developed aikido primarily during the late 1920s through the 1930s through the synthesis of the older martial arts that he had studied.

In aikido, as in virtually all the Japanese martial arts, there are both physical and mental aspects of training. The physical training in aikido is diverse, covering general physical fitness and conditioning, as well as specific techniques.

Because a substantial portion of any aikido curriculum consists of throws, the first thing most students learn is how to safely fall or roll. The specific techniques for attack include both strikes and grabs; the techniques for defense consist of throws and pins. After basic techniques are learned, students study freestyle defense against multiple opponents, and in certain styles, techniques with weapons.

Aikido incorporates elements of judo and jujitsu, among other Japanese martial arts. It is classified as a grappling style of martial arts. It is not an Olympic sport.

*** Judo (a Japanese Martial Art)**

Judo is one of only two martial arts that are Olympic sports (the other is Tae Kwon Do). In Judo, the object is to throw one's opponent to the ground, immobilize or subdue the opponent by using a grappling maneuver, joint lock or choke. Unlike other martial arts, kicks, punches and thrusts are not allowed in competition or freestyle practice.

In English, Judo is translated as "the gentle way" – instead of meeting force with force, this refers to the principle of using one's opponent's strength against him and adapting well to changing circumstances.

For example, if the attacker pushes against his opponent, he would find his opponent stepping to the side and allowing (often with the aid of a foot to trip him up) his momentum to throw him forwards (the inverse being true for pulling).

Judo throws employ leverage rather than pure strength; a competitor can pull an opponent off-balance or get below the opponent's center of gravity to toss him or her to the ground.

This sport, developed by Kano Jigoro in the mid 19th century, has many similarities to the ancient art of jujitsu. But unlike older martial arts, which have the sole purpose of combat fighting, judo offers a holistic approach to life that extends far beyond martial arts training.

* **Kendo (a Japanese Martial Art)**

Its name means "way of the sword," and this ancient martial art is over 650 years old. Practitioners use practice swords of bamboo, called shinai. They wear protective clothing that includes body padding, padded gloves and a mask with metal bars that protect the face. Attached to the mask are shoulder protectors that protrude up and over the shoulders.

The wide divided skirts, called hakama, allow fighters to move freely; the garment hides their leg movements, making it difficult for opponents to guess one another's moves.

As in other martial arts, Kendo students learn various forms, called kata, and also participate in sparring, or fencing, competitions.

Chinese Martial Arts

China has one of the longest histories of continuously recorded martial arts tradition of any society in the world, with hundreds of varied styles. Each of these distinctive styles has its own set of techniques and ideas.

According to legend, the reign of the Yellow Emperor, Huangdi, introduced the earliest forms of martial arts to China. The Yellow Emperor is described as a famous general who, before becoming China's leader around 2698 B.C., wrote lengthy treatises on medicine, astrology and the martial arts.

The missive "The Art of War," written during the 6th century B.C. by Sun Tzu, deals directly with military warfare but contains ideas that pertain to the Chinese

martial arts. Those examples show that over time, the ideas evolved and took on a philosophical tone.

Taoist practitioners have been practicing Tao Yin, physical exercises similar to early forms of Tai Chi Chuan, at least as early as the 500 B.C. era. The Taoist symbol of yin/yang shows how strength should be balanced with compassion and gentleness, a tenet of many forms of martial arts.

With regards to the Shaolin style of martial arts, the oldest evidence of Shaolin participation in combat are records from 728 A.D. that attests to two occasions: a defense of the Shaolin Monastery from bandits around 610 A.D., and their subsequent role in the defeat of Wang Shichong at the Battle of Hulao in 621 A.D. By the mid-16th century, military experts from all over China were traveling to Shaolin to study its fighting techniques. The 1,600-year-old Shaolin Temple is the most famous landmark in the martial arts world.

Chinese martial arts started to spread internationally with the end of the Chinese Civil War and the founding of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949. Many well-known martial art practitioners chose to escape from the PRC's rule and migrate to Taiwan, Hong Kong and other parts of the world.

Those masters started to teach within the overseas Chinese communities but eventually they expanded their teachings to include people from other cultures.

Some famous practitioners of Chinese martial arts include Jackie Chan, Jet Li and the late Bruce Lee.

The term Kung Fu does not refer to a particular style of martial arts; it commonly refers to Chinese martial arts in general. The term became popular in the late 1960s, because of the Kung Fu TV series and Hong Kong films, with Bruce Lee in particular.

The main Chinese Martial Arts are karate and tai chi.

*** Karate (a Chinese Martial Art)**

Karate, an amalgam of Chinese and Japanese martial arts, is known primarily as a striking art (it is translated from Japanese as “Empty Hand.”

It originated in the southernmost islands of Japan, the Ryukyu islands that were originally allied with China; Japan later took control of these islands. The largest of these islands is Okinawa. This martial art developed, therefore, with these distinct influences.

The sport features punching, kicking, knee/elbow strikes and open handed techniques. However, grappling, joint manipulations, locks, restraints/traps, throws and vital point striking also appear in karate.

It has many similarities to the Korean sport of Taekwondo, one note of distinction, however, is that Taekwondo uses more kicks, while Karate has a greater emphasis on punches and strikes.

There are many components to modern karate training, including forms and sparring. It is an art, sport, and self-defense training. Weapons comprise another important training area, as well as the psychological elements incorporated into a proper attitude such as perseverance, fearlessness, virtue, and leadership skills.

Karate may be practiced for many reasons, but was originally developed for self-defense. The forms, or kata, contain a variety of techniques intended for this purpose: hand strikes, kicks, locking, and grappling. However, proper training is required to make these techniques usable against a determined aggressor.

Most styles include some form of two-person pre-arranged self-defense exercises as well as sparring or semi-sparring (structured sparring with limited options allowed for either partner). This allows for the development of a sense of range and timing. A number of styles practice hard-contact sparring.

Some schools are criticized for claiming to teach practical martial arts despite a lack of two-person training to develop needed attributes. An instructor may believe that practicing kata suffices to develop the necessary skills.

Other schools may intentionally place emphasis on tournament preparation, physical conditioning, or aesthetics (developing form for form's sake), rather than self-defense. These schools will typically still teach self-defense techniques as well.

*** Tai Chi (a Chinese Martial Art)**

Sometimes called “moving meditation,” Tai Chi has been regarded as a martial art, and its traditional practitioners still teach it as one. It has developed a worldwide following among many thousands of people for purposes of health and longevity. Tai Chi theory and practice is centered on the principles of traditional Chinese medicine. Its benefits include health maintenance and stress management.

Originally developed in China as a form of self-defense, this graceful form of exercise has existed for about 2,000 years. Tai chi training first and foremost involves learning solo routines, known as forms. And while the image of Tai Chi in popular culture is typified by exceedingly slow movement, many styles (including the three most popular, Yang, Wu and Chen) have secondary forms of a faster pace. The other half of traditional tai chi training (though many modern schools disregard it entirely) are partner exercises known as pushing hands, as well as martial applications of the postures of the form.

It's becoming increasingly popular around the world, both as a basic exercise program and as a complement to other health care methods. According to the Mayo Clinic, health benefits include stress reduction, greater balance and increased flexibility — especially for older adults.

Korean Martial Arts

Martial arts have existed in Korea since the earliest ages, although they were lost for a time during the 20th Century. Much of Korea's martial heritage disappeared during the 1910-45 Japanese occupation of Korea, during which time the Japanese forbade the practice of Korean martial arts.

After the Japanese occupation, new Korean martial arts like hapkido and taekwondo blossomed, and interest in Korea's own ancient martial traditions grew. Today, Taekwondo is the national sport of South Korea.

Going back to ancient times, during the Goguryeo dynasty (around the time of Christ) it is believed that subak (a general term for barehand martial arts imported from China), pronounced Shoubo, was practiced. Paintings showing

martial arts have been found on the walls of royal tombs, which were believed to have been built for Goguryeo kings sometime between 3 and 427 CE.

Subak is mentioned in government records from the Goguryeo dynasty through the Joseon (or Yi) dynasty, which lasted from 1392-1910. Practicing subak became part of the training for Silla's hwarang warriors and this contributed to its spread on the Korean peninsula. But again we do not know exactly which techniques the hwarang warriors practiced.

Quite often Buddhist monks, who added more spiritual aspects to the art, instructed the hwarang warriors. Their greatest contribution to the development of Korean martial arts is probably adding a spiritual dimension to the training practices, something that Korean martial arts lacked before.

In spite of Korea's rich history of ancient and traditional martial arts, Korean martial arts faded into obscurity during the Joseon Dynasty. Martial arts were lowly regarded by the society's scholar-kings. Remnants of traditional martial arts such as Subak and Taekyon were banned from practice by the general populace.

The art nearly vanished, but Taekyon survived through underground teaching and folk custom. As the Japanese colonization established a firm foothold in Korea, the few Koreans who were able to attend Japanese universities were exposed to Okinawan and Japanese martial arts. Koreans in China were also exposed to Chinese martial arts. By 1945, when the Korean peninsula was liberated from Japanese colonization, many martial arts schools reflecting foreign influence were formed and developed under various names.

By the end of the Korean War, nine martial arts schools (translated as kwan) had opened. These schools unified into one, "tae-kwon-do," submitted by General Choi Hong Hi, a general in the South Korean army and the founder of the Oh Do Kwan, for the new unified form. Following Taekwondo's official name submission on April 11, 1955, The Korean Taekwondo Association (KTA) was formed in 1959 to facilitate the unification. Shortly thereafter, taekwondo made its debut in North America.

* Hapkido (a Korean Martial Art)

With its flowing, circular movements and philosophy of non-resistance, Hapkido bears striking resemblance to the Japanese martial art of Aikido. In fact, hap means "harmony," or "joining;" ki describes internal energy, strength, or power; and do means "way" or "art." Thus, hapkido, which shares the same Chinese characters with aikido, translates as "the way of coordinated power."

While some commentators claim hapkido has a Japanese lineage, others state that its origins lay with indigenous Korean martial arts.

On the "hard-soft" scale of martial arts, hapkido stands somewhere in the middle, employing "soft" techniques similar to aikido and "hard" techniques reminiscent of taekwondo and forms of karate. Even the "hard" techniques, though, emphasize circular rather than linear movements.

Different hapkido schools emphasize different techniques -- joint locks, pressure points, throws, kicks, and other strikes. However, some core techniques are found in each school (kwan), and all techniques should follow the three principles of hapkido, non-resistance, circular motion and the "water principle."

Hwa, or non-resistance, is simply the act of remaining relaxed and not directly opposing an opponent's strength. For example, if an opponent were to push against a hapkido student's chest, rather than resist and push back, the hapkido student would avoid a direct confrontation by moving in the same direction as the push and utilizing the opponent's forward momentum to throw him.

Won, the circular principle, is a way to gain momentum for executing the techniques in a natural and free-flowing manner. If an opponent attacks in linear motion, as in a punch or knife thrust, the hapkido student would redirect the opponent's force by leading the attack in a circular pattern, thereby adding the attacker's power to his own. Once he has redirected the power, the hapkido student can execute any of a variety of techniques to incapacitate his attacker. The hapkido practitioner learns to view an attacker as an "energy entity" rather than as a physical entity. The bigger the person is, the more energy a person has, the better it is for the hapkido student.

Yu, the water principle, can be thought of as the soft, adaptable strength of water. Hapkido is "soft" in that it does not rely on physical force alone, much like water is soft to touch. It is adaptable in that a hapkido master will attempt to deflect an opponent's strike, in a way that is similar to free-flowing water being divided around a stone only to return and envelop it.

*** Taekwondo (a Korean Martial Art)**

Taekwondo is one of the most widely practiced martial arts in the world. It is one of two martial arts represented at the Olympics (judo is the other one).

As with many other martial arts, taekwondo is a combination of combat technique, self-defense, sport, exercise, entertainment, and philosophy. It developed after the end of the Japanese occupation of Korea in 1945 and quickly spread throughout the world after the Korean War, which ended in 1953.

Although there are great doctrinal and technical differences among taekwondo organizations, the art in general emphasizes kicks thrown from a mobile stance, using the leg's greater reach and power to disable the opponent from a distance. Taekwondo training also includes a comprehensive system of blocks, punches, open-handed strikes, various take-downs or sweeps, throws, and some joint locks.

Taekwondo distinguishes itself from martial arts such as karate by its emphasis on kicking instead of the reliance on hand techniques of these other martial arts. Taekwondo practitioners believe that the leg is the longest and strongest weapon a martial artist has, and kicks thus have the greatest potential to execute powerful strikes without successful retaliation.

Although only sparring is contested in the Olympics, breaking and forms are also contested frequently in other competitions. All three are parts of a traditional Taekwondo curriculum, with a fourth part being Hosinsul (self-defense). Olympic style sparring consists of 3 non-stop rounds of contact with rest in between.

Taekwondo as a sport and exercise is popular with people of both sexes and of many ages. Physically, taekwondo develops strength, speed, balance, flexibility, and stamina. An example of the union of mental and physical discipline is the

breaking of boards, which requires both physical mastery of the technique and the concentration to focus one's strength.