

Shotokan

Shotokan (Shotokan-ryū) is a style of karate, developed from various martial arts by Gichin Funakoshi (1868–1957) and his son Gigo (Yoshitaka) Funakoshi (1906–1945). Gichin was born in Okinawa. And he brought karate to Honshū - Tokyo during the 1910s and 1920s, but Funakoshi is widely credited with having popularized karate through a series of public demonstrations, and by promoting the development of university karate clubs, including those at Keio, Waseda, Hitotsubashi (Shodai), Takushoku, Chuo, Gakushuin, and Hosei.

Etymology

Shotokan was the name of the first official dojo built by Funakoshi, in 1936 at Mejiro, and destroyed in 1945 as a result of allied bombing. Shoto (Shotokan-ryū), meaning "pine-waves" (the movement of pine needles when the wind blows through them), was Funakoshi's pen-name, which he used in his poetic and philosophical writings and messages to his students. The Japanese kanji (Shotokan-ryū) means "house" or "hall". In honour of their sensei, Funakoshi's students created a sign reading Shotokan-ryū which was placed above the entrance of the hall where Funakoshi taught. Gichin Funakoshi never gave his style a name, just calling it "karate".

Characteristics

Shotokan training is usually divided into three parts: kihon (basics), kata (forms or patterns of moves), and kumite (sparring). Techniques in kihon and kata are characterized by deep, long stances that provide stability, enable powerful movements, and strengthen the legs. Shotokan is often regarded as a 'hard' and 'external' martial art because it is taught that way to beginners and coloured belts to develop strong basic techniques and stances. Initially strength and power are demonstrated instead of slower, more flowing motions. Those who progress to brown and black belt level develop a much more fluid style which incorporates grappling and some aikido-like techniques, which can be found in the black belt katas. Kumite techniques mirror these stances and movements at a basic level, but progress to being more flexible with greater experience.[citation needed]

Philosophy

Gichin Funakoshi laid out the Twenty Precepts of Karate, (or Niju kun) which form the foundations of the art, before his students established the JKA. Within these twenty principles, based heavily on Bushido and Zen, lies the philosophy of Shotokan. The principles allude to notions of humility, respect, compassion, patience, and both an inward and outward calmness. It was Funakoshi's belief that through karate practice and observation of these 20 principles, the karateka would improve their person.

The Dojo kun lists five philosophical rules for training in the dojo, such as "seek perfection of character" and "respect others". The Dojo kun is usually posted on a wall in the dojo, and some shotokan clubs recite the Dojo kun at the beginning or end of each class to provide motivation and a context for further training.

Funakoshi also wrote: "The ultimate aim of Karate lies not in victory or defeat, but in the perfection of the character of the participant."

Kata

Kata is often described as a set sequence of karate moves organized into a pre-arranged fight against imaginary opponents. The kata consists of kicks, punches, sweeps, strikes, blocks, and throws. Body movement in various kata includes stepping, twisting, turning, dropping to the ground, and jumping. In Shotokan, kata is not a performance or a demonstration, but is for individual karateka to practice full techniques—with every technique potentially a killing blow (ikken hisatsu)—while paying particular attention to form and timing (rhythm). As the karateka grows older, more emphasis is placed on the health benefits of practicing kata, promoting fitness while keeping the body soft, supple, and agile.

Several Shotokan groups have introduced kata from other styles into their training, but when the JKA was formed, Nakayama laid down 27 kata as the kata syllabus for this organization. Even today, thousands of Shotokan dojo only practice these 27 kata. The standard kata are: Taikyoku shodan (sometimes termed Kata Kihon or Kihon Kata) (Shotokan-ryū), Heian shodan (Shotokan-ryū), Heian nidan (Shotokan-ryū), Heian sandan (Shotokan-ryū), Heian yondan (Shotokan-ryū), Heian godan (Shotokan-ryū), Bassai dai (Shotokan-ryū)

(ÔÛ), Kanku dai (³z'), Hangetsu (J), Jitte (AK), Gankaku (©'), Tekki shodan (D µ), Tekki nidan (D œµ), Tekki sandan (D µ), Nijikata (œAÛe), Chinte (IK), SMchin (i-), MeikyM (á), Unsu (ôK), Bassai shM («^), Kankk shM (³z), Wankan (ç), Gojkshiho shM ("AÛi), Gojkshiho dai ("AÛi'), and Ji'in (Hp).

Kumite

Kumite, or sparring (lit. Partner exercise), is the practical application of kata to real opponents. While the techniques used in sparring are only slightly different than kihon, the formalities of kumite in Shotokan karate were first instituted by Masatoshi Nakayama wherein basic, intermediate, and advanced sparring techniques and rules were formalized.

Shotokan practitioners first learn how to apply the techniques taught in kata to "hypothetical" opponents by way of kata bunkai. Kata bunkai then matures into controlled kumite.

Kumite is the third part of the Shotokan triumvirate of Kihon-Kata-Kumite. Kumite is taught in ever increasing complexity from beginner through low grade blackbelt (1st - 2nd) to intermediate (3rd - 4th) and advanced (5th onwards) level practitioners.

Beginners first learn kumite through basic drills, of 1, 3 or 5 attacks to the head (jodan) or body (chudan) with the defender stepping backwards whilst blocking and only countering on the last defence. These drills use basic (kihon) techniques and develop a sense of timing and distance in defence against a known attack.

At around purple belt level karateka learn one-step sparring (ippon kumite). Though there is only one step involved, rather than three or five, this exercise is more advanced because it involves a greater variety of attacks and blocks usually the defenders own choice. It also requires the defender to execute a counter-attack faster than in the earlier types of sparring. Counter-attacks may be almost anything, including strikes, grapples, and take-down manoeuvres.

Some schools prescribe the defences, most notable the Kase-ha Shotokan-ryk which uses an 8 step, three directional blocking and attacking pattern which develops from yellow belt level right through to advanced level.

The next level of kumite is freestyle one-step sparring (jiyu ippon kumite). This type of kumite, and its successor—free sparring, have been documented extensively by Nakayama and are expanded upon by the JKA instructor trainee program, for those clubs under the JKA. Freestyle one-step sparring is similar to one-step sparring but requires the karateka to be in motion. Practicing one-step sparring improves free sparring (jiyu kumite) skills, and also provides an opportunity for practicing major counter-attacks (as opposed to minor counter-attacks). Tsutomu Ohshima states that freestyle one-step sparring is the most realistic practice in Shotokan karate, and that it is more realistic than free sparring.

Free sparring (jiyu kumite) is the last element of sparring to be learned. In this exercise, two training partners are free to use any karate technique or combination of attacks, and the defender at any given moment is free to avoid, block, counter, or attack with any karate technique. Training partners are encouraged to make controlled and focused contact with their opponent, but to withdraw their attack as soon as surface contact has been made. This allows a full range of target areas to be attacked (including punches and kicks to the face, head, throat, and body) with no padding or protective gloves, but maintains a degree of safety for the participants. Throwing one's partner and performing takedowns are permitted in free sparring, however it is unusual for competition matches to involve extended grappling or ground-wrestling, as Shotokan karateka are encouraged to end an encounter with a single attack, avoiding extended periods of conflict or unnecessary contact.

Kaishu ippon kumite is an additional sparring exercise that is usually introduced for higher grades. This starts in a similar manner to freestyle one-step sparring; the attacker names the attack he/she will execute, attacks with that technique, and the defender blocks and counters the attack. Unlike freestyle one-step sparring, however, the attacker must then block the defender's counter-attack and strike back. This exercise is often considered more difficult than either freestyle one-step sparring or free sparring, as the defender typically cannot escape to a safe distance in time to avoid the counter to the counter-attack.

A point of note, training Kumite within the dojo is not identical to sport Kumite. In Kumite any and all techniques are valid; punches, knife hand strikes, headbutt, locks, takedowns, kicks, etc. In competition; certain regulations apply, certain techniques are valid, and certain target areas are restricted (such as the joints or throat). The purpose of competition is to score points through the application of Kumite principles while creating an exciting and competitive atmosphere, whereas the purpose of training Kumite in the dojo is to kill or cripple an opponent in a realistic situation.