

Kojosho History

NOTE TO THE READER: Mr. Absher began his study of Kempo over 60 years ago. In 1966, the term KOJASHO was coined to identify his first karate school. Some years later the name KOJOSHO was adopted to identify the growing Kempo karate organization. Since that time, students have interchanged these names and even used them to identify the art before the terms existed.

Every serious student should have a working knowledge of the history and development of Karate and the Kojosho System. However, the student should also understand that history has never been carved in granite. Records have been kept haphazardly, details have been lost through oral transmission and much has been destroyed by fire or war or other disasters, both natural and man-made. At times, critical information has been deliberately withheld, concealed to maintain secrecy, or intentionally shrouded in mysticism and legend

Reliable and accurate historical records have been kept only since about 1900 AD. And though some Karate styles may claim more ancient lineage, very few can prove their claim in a way that would satisfy even the most lenient court of law. Many historical gaps have been filled by conjecture masquerading as fact or hearsay evidence presented as The Truth. The irony of history, it seems, is that it is conceived in the past and born in the present as a conundrum for the future.

Given those considerations, the following sections on Kojosho History attempt to reflect the most current thinking by the most serious scholars.

Recent Kojosho History

Joseph Gorick arrived in Hawaii in the early 1930s as part of the Pan-American transpacific flight team and in the years before the war, he had the opportunity to study karate kempo and jujitsu. While in Hawaii, he was taught 1) karate from Kojia Shoi (an Okinawan of some renown), 2) kempo from his father-in-law Ed [Kosaburo] Matsu and 3) jujitsu from Paul Kaelemakule. Note: Paul also Wally Jay's first teacher. Wally went on to write multiple books on small-circle jujitsu and was eventually inducted into the Black Belt Magazine's Black Belt Hall of Fame.

Although Gorick taught them (karate, kempo, and jujitsu) as three separate and distinct arts, many of his students teach them as one style known as kojasho kempo karate. In the late 1950s, Gorick relocated to Santa Fe, New Mexico. Amongst the students, the present chief instructor Fred Absher began his study with Mr. Gorik.

The first school was established in 1966 in Las Cruces New Mexico, and since that time schools have sprung up in various parts of the country and to a lesser extent even internationally. During his tenure, he has carried the Kojasho / Kojosho banner around the world. As a competitor he won state, regional and national competitions and served as captain of the United States team to the First World Tae kwon do championships in Korea in 1973. Additionally, he has authored several books and articles about the Kojasho kempo.

In 1972, this close-knit group formed the International Kojosho Karate Federation as an umbrella organization in an effort to centralize testing, provide tournaments and seminars as well as accommodate

membership interest from other styles. Today, many schools go by the stylistic name Kojosho kempo karate. Although curriculum varies from school to school, the classical signature is of a softer style.

Annual seminars and tournaments have brought members of the organization together, with Australia, Mexico, Costa Rica and Hawaii being just a few countries that have hosted these events. The system has hosted two camps each year for over 55 years. Spring Camp, started in 1970, and draws people from all over the country, always held on Memorial Day weekend. Fall Camp, which started in 1973 was held at Elephant Butte Lake in southern New Mexico for 50 years and is now being held in La Junta, Colorado each October.

Many years ago, Mr. Absher aligned the organization with the United States karate alliance (Jim Hawkes), and then with the Butokukai, under Hanshi Richard Kim. These national and international organizations membership have proven to be invaluable, and have been in part, responsible for the global recognition kojasho and the International Kojosho Karate Federation enjoys.

Kojosho kempo karate is deeply rooted in China and even though change was inevitable, the style has retained a classic motion and signature. The early sets of this unique method were examples of how animal movements could be translated into offensive and defensive theories. Later, more possibilities were added, and the thought-provoking element concepts emerged. With time, masters used this guide to create new, and sometimes expanded steps, and to devise kata. These sets were taught in order of progressive difficulty and ultimately linked into one long form.

Early Kojosho Kempo History

The pervasive influence of Chinese boxing on the development of almost every Asian martial art is sometimes indistinct, but always unmistakable. Beginning nearly 2,000 years ago, the Chinese introduced combat techniques that started the radically divergent growth of the early fighting styles of Okinawa, Korea, and Japan. In Japan, the initial Chinese impact was felt in the growth and evolution of jujitsu¹ and atemi waza (body striking) techniques. In Korea, the martial arts flourished during the rise of the Hwarang warriors, but later fell into decline. In Okinawa, the Chinese influence was warmly sought and eagerly welcomed as Okinawan martial artists often traveled to China in order to gain new insights and to refine their technique.

The growth of boxing styles in China was exceedingly diverse and staggeringly complex. From its Shaolin Temple beginnings around the sixth century, Chinese boxing ultimately grew to encompass hundreds of separate styles. Each style was a personal revelation, and many variants of every major style eventually appeared. In an attempt to classify this profusion, the Yangtze River was chosen as a suitable boundary and a division was made separating Northern Shaolin from Southern Shaolin boxing styles. Typically, Northern Shaolin boxing emphasized kicking techniques and Southern Shaolin boxing emphasized hand techniques. Then, when the Hsing I, Tai Chi, and Pa Kua schools gained in popularity around the 17th and 18th centuries, another convenient division separated these internal schools from the external Shaolin schools. These internal/external, hard/soft divisions worked fairly well, although there were many styles that were not easily pigeonholed.

The roots of today's Karate are found in China. For centuries, and particularly during the Han, Tang, and Ming Dynasties, China was literally and figuratively the center of Asia the dominant country in the Orient, both culturally and militarily. Poets, artists, and scholars came from all the surrounding countries to live,

work, and study in China. And some of those who studied Chinese boxing returned home with those skills. Buddhist priests came to meditate and train at the Shaolin Temples and when they left to spread their faith, they took with them the fighting skills they learned at the Temples. Chinese warriors utilized Shaolin combat techniques wherever they fought. Merchants traveled, some with Shaolin training. And Chinese officials, who were proficient, spread Shaolin boxing wherever they were sent. And in ways both formal and informal, Chinese boxing spread throughout Asia and affected the evolution of every emerging national fighting style.

Karate, as we know it today, is the product of Chinese influence and Okinawan descent. Some Okinawan styles trace their lineage to the Shaolin boxing techniques taught by the Thirty-Six Chinese families who went to live in Okinawa in the late-1300s. Some styles include in their lineage Kung Shang Kąung (Kusanku in Okinawan), a Chinese official who spent time in Okinawa in the late-1700sⁱⁱ. And some cite Iwahⁱⁱⁱ, a Chinese who taught Shaolin boxing in the late-1800s, both in Okinawa and at the Kojo family dojo^{iv} (martial arts school) in Fuzhou^v, a coastal Chinese city near Okinawa.

Karate gradually developed in Okinawa. And even though Karate movement became less Chinese and more Okinawan, Okinawans still called their fighting art *İKempo*, the Okinawan pronunciation of the Chinese *İChuan-Fa* (*İFist Method*), or *İTo-de*, the Okinawan pronunciation of *İChina Hand*, in deference to its Chinese roots.

In the early-1900s, although Okinawan Karate had previously maintained close ties with its parent, Chinese boxing, many Okinawan Karate teachers decided to change the written characters of Karate from *İChina Hand* to *İEmpty Hand*. The name was changed to establish Karate as a separate and distinct Japanese martial art. However, some Okinawan Karate teachers continued to use the name *İKempo*.

Karate's exposure to the modern world began when a group of Okinawan Karate teachers decided to introduce Karate to Japan. After much deliberation, the man they sent was Gichin Funakoshi. Gichin Funakoshi is known today as the Father of Modern Karate. In 1922, he was chosen to take Karate, then a limited Okinawan martial art, and demonstrate its universal application before a highly critical Japanese audience. Other famous Okinawan Karate teachers followed Funakoshi to Japan, and together, they firmly established Karate as a popular Japanese martial art.

In the 1930s, Hawaii's large Asian population made it a fertile place for the introduction of several Chinese and Okinawan Karate styles (Kosho-ryu Kempo, various Gung-Fu styles, etc.). This eventually led to the development of eclectic Karate styles (Kajukenbo, etc.) beginning in the 1940s. From Hawaii, several Karate styles then migrated to the mainland United States.

The great interest in Asian martial arts in the United States began after World War II when American servicemen were exposed to Oriental arts and cultures during the occupation of Okinawa and Japan. When they were discharged, many brought the Okinawan (Shorin-ryu, Shorei-ryu, Uechi-ryu, etc.) and Japanese (Shotokan, Goju, Shito, Wado, etc.) Karate styles they learned back to the United States.

In the years following the Korean War, Americans stationed in Korea began studying Korean Karate, a hybrid combining the remaining traces of Chinese influenced Korean styles with the Karate introduced by the Japanese. And they, too, brought the Karate styles (Tang Soo Do, Mu Duk Kwan, Chung Do Kwan, etc.) they studied back to the United States when they returned.

During the 1950s, Okinawan, Japanese, and Korean Karate organizations began to export their national Karate styles worldwide.

In the 1970s, a boom in all Asian martial arts began that was greatly fueled by the increased awareness engendered by the communications media^{vi}.

Today, extremely high-quality martial arts instruction can be found almost everywhere in the world.

History of the Kojosho System ([View Lineage Charts](#))

LEGACY OF SHAOLIN

Kojosho is one of many systems derived from the Southern Shaolin that traces its lineage back to Hua-Tao, the Chinese philosopher and physician. Hua-Tao lived in the third century and is the person generally credited with the creation of a series of exercises based on the movements of animals, this creation gave birth to numerous styles of self-defense.

Kojosho works a series of exercises named the Eighteen Postures. And oral Kojosho tradition maintains that a certain Master Matsu learned them while studying in China. Kojosho History has painted him as a student, samurai, fisherman, sailor and Kempo master. Although no evidence exist to support the archetypical story of Matsu, and photos are the efforts of well meaning students to embellish this ancient story, a story that remains an important part of the Kojosho oral tradition.

Although Kojosho does claim lineage to the Eighteen Postures of the Shaolin, it would be presumptuous to assume that the Eighteen Postures of Kojosho are the very same Eighteen Postures that the Shaolin monks practiced and taught^{vii}. Almost 2,000 years have passed since then and the Eighteen Postures must surely have evolved as they were passed from teacher to student during that long period of time.

REFERENCES:

ⁱ Japanese martial art employing primarily grappling techniques

ⁱⁱ The Bible of Karate: Bubushi, p. 34

ⁱⁱⁱ The Bible of Karate: Bubushi, p. 35, 37

^{iv} The Bible of Karate: Bubushi, p. 35, 37

^v Also spelled Fuchou, Foochow, and Fuchow; Okinawan Karate, p. 49

^{vi} The Kung Fu television series, starring David Carradine, and the movies starring Bruce Lee fueled the worldwide appetite for the martial arts

^{vii} Some Hsing-I styles also work Eighteen Postures that are similar to, yet different from, the Eighteen Postures of Kojosho