

Martial Arts History



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Myth and Legend

Some say that the birth of the Martial Arts occurred when Bodhidharma, an Indian Monk, made an epic journey across the Himalayan mountains in the years between 500 and 526, eventually arriving and settling at the Shaolin Monastery in the Chinese province of Hun-an. He took with him a system of exercises devised to help the monks in their rigorous regime of work and meditation, and to be able to defend themselves against bandits while on their travels. It's a wonderful story but even if true it only explains a tiny part of the development of the Martial Arts, because as long as there has been mankind there has been fighting.



The Chinese Arts

China has one of the longest histories of martial arts tradition of any society in the world, and with hundreds of styles over the past two to four thousand years, many distinctive styles of Kung- Fu have been developed, each with its own set of martial techniques, ideas & strategies. There are also common themes to the different Kung Fu styles, which are often classified by families or schools. There are Kung Fu styles that mimic movements from animals and others that gather inspiration

from various Chinese philosophies. Some Kung Fu styles put most of their focus into the belief of the harnessing of chi / qi energy, while others concentrate solely on competition and exhibition. Each style of Kung Fu offers a different approach to the common problems of self defence, health, fitness and self-development.



The Japanese Arts

Before the restoration of the Meiji era in 1868 a very large number of *ryu* (schools) existed, there were reckoned to be about 3000 *ryu*. Most of the *ryu* were created by noble *Samurai* (members of the military class of warriors), others simply by *ronin* (samurai without a Lord) or even common people. The *ryu* sometimes divided into *ha* (branches) as a result of the various masters composing new techniques or movements from old ones. The seat of a *ryu* was usually located where the founder lived. Some *ryu* were independent, others belonged to the great *Daimyo* (families). Each master had his own *ryuji* (style), and transmitted the *okuden* (secrets) of his style to a few chosen disciples. Most of the *ryu* which still existed before the second world war have now disappeared, for the old masters are dead and the pupils have deserted the dojo. According to the Bujutsu Ryu Soroku, a work published in 1843, there were in Japan at that date some 150 important *Ryu*; 66 teaching **Ken-Jutsu** and **Iai-Jutsu** (sword), 31 teaching **So-Jutsu** (spear), 20 teaching **Ju-Jutsu** (grappling/joint locking), 19 in the use of firearms and 14 devoted to **Kyu-Jutsu** (bow). Any Bujutsu/Budo system established before 1877 are recognised as **Ko Ryu** (old schools). Thereafter they are known as **Gendai Bujutsu** (modern martial arts). Some *ryu* like the **Chujo Ryu** (sword), are now extinct, others, like the **Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu** (sword and other traditional weapons), still flourish today, dating back more than 500 years.

You may have noticed that there is no mention of Judo or Karate, that's because Judo is a sport (derived from Jujitsu) and Karate is not a Japanese Martial Art although it has been practised there since 1922.



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