

Warrior Spirit Karate

“Let Us Develop The Warrior In You”

Wado-Ryu

Hironori Otsuka Sensei

Wado translates as either "way of peace" or "Japanese way" since the kanji can be read both ways. Grand Master Otsuka Hironori, the founder of Wado-Ryu karate, was born in Shimodate City, Ibaragi, Japan on June 1, 1892. He was the first son of Otsuka Tokujiro, a doctor of medicine. In April of 1897, Otsuka Sensei started jujitsu under the supervision of his mother's uncle, Ebashi Chojiro.

In 1905, Otsuka Sensei entered Shimozuma Middle School, where he studied Shindo Yoshin Ryu jujitsu under Nakayama Tatsuaburo Sensei. Nakayama Sensei was the most senior and highest graded student of Matsuoka Dorin who, in turn, studied Yoshin Ryu jujitsu under Tozuka Hidetosi.

In 1910 Otsuka Sensei entered Waseda University to study commerce but was not able to finish because of the death of his father. In 1917 Otsuka Sensei started work at the Kawasaki Bank. This did not deter him from continuing his studies in the Martial Arts. He visited many dojo and exchanged technique with those he met. During this time, he met Ueshiba Morihei, the founder of Aikido, and they became good friends.

On June 1, 1921, Otsuka Sensei received his graduation certificate in Shindo Yoshin Ryu jujitsu from Nakayama Sensei. In June of 1922, the Japanese Education Department conducted their first Sports festival in Tokyo. Funakoshi Gichin was invited to demonstrate Okinawa Tode which was later to be known as karate. Otsuka Sensei heard about the demonstrations and became very interested. He visited Funakoshi Sensei at the Meisei Juku and discussed various aspects of martial arts with Funakoshi Sensei. Funakoshi Sensei agreed to teach Otsuka Sensei what he knew about Okinawa Tode, and the lessons began the same day. In May of 1924, Otsuka Sensei and Funakoshi Sensei demonstrated Yakusoku Kumite (pre-arranged fighting with a partner) in public for the first time.

In 1928, Otsuka Sensei resigned from his position at the bank to become a full-time martial arts instructor. At this time, he was a Chief Instructor of Shindo Yoshin Ryu as well as an assistant instructor for Funakoshi Sensei. Otsuka Sensei and Funakoshi Sensei eventually began to disagree over certain aspects of training, in particular jiyu kumite.

Otsuka Sensei gradually began to go his own way, and by May of 1934, Wado-Ryu karate was recognized as an independent style, although at that time it was called Dai Nippon KarateDo Shinko Club. In 1935, Kano Jigoro, founder of Kodokan Judo and who was recognized as the best martial artist in Japan at that time, recommended to the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai Federation that karate-jitsu be accepted as a martial art, as an extension of Judo.

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In 1938 the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai awarded Otsuka Sensei the rank of Renshi-Go. He demonstrated technique for the All-Japan Traditional Martial Arts Festival, and his style was registered as Shin Shu Wado-Ryu. In March of 1939, the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai asked all karate styles to register their names officially. Otsuka Sensei registered the name Wado-Ryu.

In 1942, the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai awarded Otsuka Sensei the rank of Kyoshi-Go, and in 1944 he was asked by the same organization to become the Chief Instructor of karate in Japan. After the end of the Second World War, the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai was ordered disbanded, and the practice of martial arts in Japan was forbidden. The Japanese martial arts were not reinstated until 1951. In 1964, three instructors from Nihon University visited in Europe and the United States to demonstrate Wado-Ryu karate. They were Suzuki Tatsuo, Arakawa Toru, and Takashima Hajime. In this same year the All Japan Karate-Do Federation was established.

In 1966, Otsuka Sensei was awarded Kun Goto Soukuo Kyokujijitsu (comparable to a knighthood) by Emperor Hirohito, for his dedication to the introduction and teaching of karate. In 1972, the President of Kokusai Budo Renmei, a member of the Royal Family, awarded Otsuka Sensei the title of Meijin, the highest possible title.

On January 29, 1982, Saiko Shihan Otsuka Hironori died at the age of 90. He had practiced martial arts for 84 years. Otsuka Sensei built his style of karate around 9 basic kata, 5 of which are regarded as fundamental.