

Sanchin Martial Arts History

The early history of Asian martial arts is poorly recorded. Legend has it, that around 500 a.d. a Buddhist monk by the name of Bodhidharma traveled from India to a Shoalin Temple in southeastern China, where he developed special exercises like Sanchin to help the monks reach higher levels of spirituality.

The Shaolin monks practiced these exercises and also created other forms which resemble the movements of animals, like the tiger, dragon and crane. The tiger represented quiet strength and ferocity, the dragon spirituality, and the crane grace and loyalty. From this temple martial arts spread to the Ryukyu Islands (Okinawa), Korea and other Asian countries.

Okinawa is a small island that lies between China and Japan. Okinawan and Chinese people traded with each other and exchanged cultural ideas. Chinese martial arts were taught for many years on Okinawa and were combined with okinawa-te, an ancient self-defense style of Okinawa. In the 1600's however, the Japanese conquered Okinawa and banned the use of edged weapons as well as the study of martial arts. That did not stop the Okinawans, for they studied in secret and developed their martial arts over the next 400 years.

Around 1900 the commissioner of public schools in Okinawa, recommended that martial arts training be included in the physical education programs of schools. This was the first official recognition of martial arts since they were forbidden in 1600. Public instruction on a large scale was first given by an Okinawan named Gichin Funakoshi. These events marked the emergence of martial arts from centuries of secrecy.

Kanbum Uechi left Okinawa in the late 1800's to study martial arts in China. He studied there for 13 years at the central temple in the Fukien Province of China. He studied a style called pangainoon, which means "half hard-half soft", under a master by the name of Zhou Zihe (Shushiwa). Kanbum excelled and obtained permission to open his own school; he was the only Okinawan to have taught in China. Kanbum Uechi later moved to Japan where he taught until his death in 1942.

Kanbum's son, Kanei, opened his first dojo in Osaka, Japan where he taught for two years. In 1942 he moved to Okinawa and opened a school in Nago. This was the first time that Kanbum Uechi's martial art was taught in Okinawa.

It is unclear as to when the name pangainoon was changed to uechi-ryu. However, until the present time, many uechi-ryu stylists still refer to their martial art as pangainoon.

George Mattson began his study of uechi-ryu in 1956 under Ryuko Tomoyose and Kanei Uechi. In 1958, Mattson returned to the United States and started teaching uechi-ryu at the Boston YMCA.

Al Ford, one of George Mattson's first students, owned and operated a dojo in Boston. It was there, in 1972, that Duane Lucia started his martial arts training under sensei Al Ford.

In 1979 the Sanchin Club was started in Boston by Duane Lucia. The club's martial arts style was based on one of the oldest and most widely practiced forms: sanchin. With Mr. Lucia's dedicated and advanced study in movement education, sports-psychology, and martial arts he developed what is now Sanchin Martial Arts.