

Founder of Wado-Ryu - Hironori Otsuka

Hironori Otsuka was born in the city of Shimodate in Ibaraki Prefecture on June 1, 1892.

On April 1, 1897, at the age of 5, he started to receive tuition in martial arts from his Uncle Chojiro Ehashi, who was a master in the former Tsuchiura Clan. In April of 1905, the 14-year-old Hironori became a disciple of Master Shinzaburo Nakayama of the Shinto Yoshin-Ryu Jujutsu school. On June 1, 1920, the 29-year-old Hironori attained the degree of full mastership in the art, which was the highest rank in the school. This formally made him the 4th Generation successor of the style.

In July of 1922, Hironori Otsuka began to study Ryukyu (Okinawan) Karate. By adding elements of Okinawan Karate to his foundation of Jujutsu he created an innovative style of martial art which blended the supreme elements of both fighting forms. At the age of 43, in May of 1934, Hironori Otsuka officially founded Wado-Ryu Karate Jutsu/Wado-Ryu Jujutsu Kenpo. Hironori used the principle of “Wa” which not only has its literal and broader meaning of “harmony”, but also indicates something that is holistic and in balance with our universe. In his composition of “武の道はただ荒事とな想ひそ和の道を究め和を求む道” (Bu no Michi wa Tada Aragoto to na Omoi so Wa no Michi wo Kiwame Wa wo Motomu Michi)which is roughly translated as “Martial art is not a path that leads to fighting and brutality. It is a path where one needs to always seek and pursue balance and harmony”. Using this theory as the principle for the school of Wado-Ryu, Hironori encouraged practitioners to use their training of martial art as a pursuit of bettering and fulfilling themselves as human beings, rather than focusing on attaining sheer strength and power from this practice. The principles to which Hironori Otsuka adhered can be adapted to an ever-changing world around us. If these principles are followed, they can help a person develop high ability to grow and adapt, and foster a resolute will and a robust body to overcome any hardship that he or she may face.

On April 29, 1966, Hironori received the Order of the Rising Sun - Gold and Silver Rays Award (Soko Kyokujitsusho) from the Japanese government for his services in proliferation of Karate.

On October 9, 1972, Hironori Otsuka was the first person in Karate to receive a rank of 10th Dan Meijin. The award was awarded by the International Martial Arts Federation (IMAF) whose governor was the General Prince Naruhiko Higashikuni (who was also Prime Minister of Japan). At that time the only other Meijin in Japanese martial arts were the late Kyuzo Mifune, the first Meijin in Judo and the late Hakudo Nakayama, the first Meijin in Kendo.

On December 20, 1981, Hironori Otsuka abdicated his position and nominated his son Jiro, Second Generation Grandmaster Hironori Otsuka, as the successor of the martial art of Wado-Ryu Karate-Do and Jujutsu Kenpo.

Hironori Otsuka passed away peacefully on January 29, 1982, at the age of 90.

Principles of Wado-Ryu

The foundation of the principles that form Wado-Ryu is encapsulated in the meaning of the Japanese character “Wa”. The literal, yet ambiguous translation of this word, “peace” and “harmony”, has been used many times to describe the principles of Wado-Ryu. However, this translation is misleading, as peace and harmony contain a completely different meaning. The actual meaning of the word “Wa” in the case of Wado-Ryu is closer to “being”, “heart”, or something that is “complete”, “whole”, or “round”. This notion of something being holistic directly correlates to the nature and purpose of practicing martial art. Throughout rigorous training, a martial artist should aim not only for physical, but also for mental and spiritual fulfilment - never basking in pride, glory, and self-satisfaction, never striving for winning and self-gain, and always striving to be a better human being through the practice of martial art while washing away all the negative habits and emotions, and turning them into positive ones. As this practice and training is repeated over and over, the practitioner continually shapes, forms, and betters his/her whole being in order to be in harmony and balance with the universe. Just as everything in our universe is round, holistic, balanced, and always having a beginning and an end, so too must the practitioner of martial art always adhere to these laws in order to pursue this state of mind, body, and spirit. This meaning of “Wa” forms the fundamental reason for the study of martial art.

Principles also seen in Wado-Ryu which can be applied to all Budo practices are Kei (敬), Ai (愛), and Rei (禮). Kei denotes respect towards one another and all things which surround us. Ai is love, care, and compassion. Rei is kindness and manner towards all those around us. A strong person who trains rigorously in martial arts has the ability to be kind and supportive of the world and be the catalyst for balance, harmony, and order.

The founder of Wado-Ryu, Hironori Otsuka, clearly demonstrated the principle of Wado-Ryu in his composition of “Wa-Ten-Chi-Jin-No-Ri-Do (和天地人之理道)”. The meaning of this is that the laws and principles (Ri-Do) of the universe (Ten), the earth (Chi), and human beings (Jin) all need to exist in balance, which is demonstrated by the word “Wa” in this composition.