

# A BRIEF HISTORY

Basic forms of self-defense have been recorded since history began. Self-defense is likely to be as old as the human race and a detailed history would become a textbook all by itself. So, I offer this brief history in the hope that it will wet your appetite for further research.



Daruma

We begin our journey with the Chinese legend of the Indian Buddhist monk Daruma Taishi (Bodhidharma). It is said that Daruma traveled from India to China by foot on a route that is long and dangerous even today. The sheer distance alone is a testament to the stamina, endurance and mental toughness of this legend! He came to Northern China to instruct the monarch of the Liang dynasty in the teachings of Buddhism. He decided to stay in China at a monastery called the Shaolin, and teach the monks there. Tradition tells us that the discipline imposed by Daruma on the monks caused many of them to pass out from exhaustion. At the next meeting he explained to them that, although the aim of Buddhism is the salvation of the soul, the body and the soul are one and that in their pathetic weekend state they could never perform the practices necessary for the attainment of true enlightenment. To help remedy this situation he implemented a physical education program to compliment the spiritual training, which copied the movements of some animals. Not all of the animals were real, like the Dragon, but the Monkey, Tiger and Crane were among the animals chosen. In later years the Shaolin monks became known as the most formidable fighters in China. This foundation led to the art of Kung fu and many other Chinese martial arts such as Tai chi. Over the centuries, these arts became widely practice because of their effective use on the battlefield in hand-to-hand combat.

The practice of these empty handed arts made their way to a group of islands to the south of Japan called the Ryukyu's. Since ancient times Okinawa, the main island of the Ryukyu's, was in contact with and often ruled by China or Japan. During the occupation of the Japanese from around 1600 to 1869, the Okinawan people were not allowed to have weapons, which led to the development of Okinawa-te (Okinawa-hand). There is very little historical information about the development of Okinawa-te because it was against the law to study this or any other fighting art that could be used against the occupying soldiers. But, it was perfectly legal for a soldier to cut a person in half to test the sharpness of their sword, so Okinawa-te had to be effective against the attacker or the defender would be killed. This unique need led to the high level of development of the art that we see today.

In 1869 the Emperor regained his power from the Tokugawa family that ruled Japan for nearly 300 years. The Samurai class was abolished and it was now okay to practice Okinawa-te out in the open. Officials noticed that the student of Okinawa-te were in very good physical condition and asked the experts of the time, Master's Itosu and Azato to organize classes to be taught in the public school system. With help of one of their student, Gichin Funakoshi, they undertook the task with great zeal. In 1921 the Ministry of Education in Japan invited Okinawa to participate in a demonstration of ancient Japanese martial arts.



Gichin Funakoshi

Gichin Funakoshi was asked by the Okinawa Department of Education to represent them in a demonstration of the art of Okinawa-te. This demonstration was the opportunity of a lifetime. There was little known about the empty handed art outside of Okinawa and this demonstration would be the beginning of the spread of karate to the rest of the World. After the demonstration, Funakoshi was invited to stay behind and teach his art, by the founder of the art of Judo, Jigoro Kano. From that time on Gichin Funakoshi spent most of the rest of his life in Japan teaching the art of karate to the Japanese people.

In the early 1920s, it was common to write the calligraphy characters of “Chinese-hand” for this art that came from China. It was unpopular to promote non-Japanese activities during this time, so Funakoshi used the other meaning of the character “empty” instead of Chinese. Thus we now have the “kara (empty) te (hand)”.

Gichin Funakoshi became known as the “Father of Modern Karate”. Not only was Funakoshi a dedicated student of the Chinese Classics, he was also a poet. He would create his poetry under the pen name of Shoto. In 1935 a nationwide committee of supporters built the first ever karate dojo (training hall) in Japan. Over the door was a sign with the name: Shoto-kan. This became known as the style of karate that is studied at Shoto’s place. **SHOTOKAN!**

After World War II the art of karate went through a rebirth with rise of the University Clubs and the participation of the American servicemen that occupied Japan. It was during this time that the Japan Karate-do Association was formed with Master Funakoshi as its first Chief Instructor. The rest, as they say, is history!

For more information on the history of Shotokan Karate, its history, Budo, Bushido or other recommended readings, please seek out the books that are listed in the Resources section of this Manual.



“Shotokan Karate-do”

“Shotokan Karate-do”