

To AJKA-International
AJKA-I of PA
Instructor Trainee's Report #2

Subject: **“History of Karate-Do”**

Martial arts are of ancient origin. As far back as 3400 B.C. there exist Egyptian paintings depicting some sort of struggle between two men. At the end of the 5th century BC founder of the Zen sect of Buddhism, Daruma Taishi (Bodhidharma), was born into the warrior class in India. This warrior class was taught unarmed combat, but Daruma decided as a young man to become a Buddhist monk. After several years of study, Daruma decided to travel and spread the teachings of the Buddha. Eventually his travels led him to China, where he took up residence at the Shaolin monastery about 500 BC.

According to legend, when Daruma began to teach the monks at Shaolin, he found they were unable to absorb his teaching or to perform the difficult ascetic practices that were intended to lead to “satori” or enlightenment. The monks’ very poor physical condition was their biggest impediment to progress. Daruma began to teach them the system of exercises that he had learned as a boy, and a set of physical and mental disciplines known as the “I Ching Sutra”. With this training, the monks eventually became the most formidable fighters in China. The art they practiced became known in Chinese as Shaolin-szu kempo and in Japanese as Shorin-ji kempo.

The word karate is a combination of two kanji characters – “kara” and “te”. Originally, Kara and Te were written as 唐手 and were defined as "Chinese hand". The meaning was a way of expressing that this form of martial arts¹ was derived from China.²

However, the shift in definition was the result of Okinawans taking advantage of a homonym; two words with different definitions but identical pronunciations. Id. The kanji “kara” and “te” were changed to 空手 which means “empty hand”.³ Adding the suffix "-do" (“karate-do”), meaning "way," implies karate as a total way of life that goes well beyond the self-defense applications. Moreover, adding a “ka” (Karate-ka) means “a practitioner of karate”.

The roots of modern Karate are found in Okinawa, the largest island of the Ryukyu chain. Okinawa’s location in the East China Sea allowed social and commercial contact with China, Korea, Japan, Java, Sumatra, Siam, Arabia, and Malacca. It is probable that seamen and traders from these regions introduced some of their own fighting arts to the Okinawans.

The Ryukyu Islands were divided into three kingdoms ruled over by chieftains who placed a high value on military skills. Wars among the chieftains and their kingdoms were frequent, especially in the seventh and eighth centuries.

¹ Martial arts is defined as any of various systems of self-defense originating in the Orient such as karate, kung fu . Webster’s New World Dictionary; Third Edition, Simon & Schuster 1991, p. 830

² Funakoshi, Gichin, Karate Do: Kyohan, Kodansha Ltd, Tokyo, Japan, 1973 p. 3, fn.1

³ The earliest known document reflecting this change is Chomo Hanashiro’s "Karate Kumite," first published in August 1905. Funakoshi Sensei, while not the first to use the "empty hand" (kanji) for karate, he was influential in popularizing this meaning by calling on his colleagues to abandon the "Chinese Hand" meaning of karate in favor of "empty hand." John Sells in his book, "Unante: The Secrets of Karate" notes that as early as 1933 the head of the Butokukai (the semi- official Japanese organization founded in 1895 to preserve and promote the martial arts and ways in Japan) while visiting Okinawa suggested the change in characters. Funakoshi in his 1935 book, "Karatedo Kyohan" did reflect this change (empty hand)

The Japanese clan of Shimazu conquered Okinawa in 1609. In the process of colonizing, the Shimazu imposed a ban on weapons. Even farming implements were under government control, being stored in special warehouses and checked in and out daily. The Shimazu invasion and subsequent oppression unified the Okinawans against the Japanese. Many of the individual “schools” of Okinawa-te, or do-de, as Karate was then known, united to form more systematic styles. These arts were forbidden, and practiced only in secrecy. Usually a master would teach one student at a time, training him at night so as not to be discovered.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the major Okinawan styles of karate were Shuri-te, Naha-te, and Tomari-te (named after the locations in which they were developed and practiced as well as for the kinds of techniques that each emphasized). Three of the greatest Okinawan Karate masters at the end of the nineteenth century were Azato (Shuri-te), Itosu (Shuri-te), and Higaonna, (Naha-te). Gichin Funakoshi, the “father of modern karate”, studied with all three of these masters, though primarily with Azato and Itosu.

Funakoshi was born in Shuri, Okinawa in 1868. He began his study of Karate at the age of 11. It was during his youth and young adulthood that Karate practice became publicly acknowledged. As a teacher in the Okinawan schools, Funakoshi had the opportunity to help his master Itosu establish Karate as a physical education program in the public schools, as well as, to participate in many demonstrations of Karate techniques. While Karate was becoming popular in Okinawa, it was still virtually unknown in Japan.

In 1917, Funakoshi was invited to Japan to lecture and demonstrate the Okinawan art of karate at a symposium sponsored by the ministry of Education (physical education in Japan at that time consisted largely of Judo, Kendo, and other martial arts training). Funakoshi’s demonstration was very well received and he was invited to teach his art in Japan. In 1922, Funakoshi returned to Japan to do so, and remained there for most of the rest of his life.

Karate became very popular in Japan, and Funakoshi traveled throughout the country lecturing and demonstrating his art. Karate clubs were established at all the major universities. Thousands of Japanese from many walks of life began to study the style of Karate taught by Funakoshi.

In 1936, Funakoshi built his first dojo in Tokyo. His Students placed a sign on the school naming the place “Shotokan” – “house of Shoto”. The name was derived from Funakoshi’s pen name “Shoto” (pine waves) that he used when he wrote poems and writings. While Sensei Funakoshi never gave his style a name it became known worldwide as Shotokan.

Around 1949, Sensei Funakoshi and his senior Shotokan students (Obata, Nakayama and Nishiyama) formed the Japan Karate Association, with Funakoshi as Chief Instructor. The Association was approved by the Ministry of Education as an educational corporation in 1958. This made it possible for leading Shotokan Karate-ka (those who practice Karate) to share knowledge, research, and technical skills, and to establish systematic training methods and instructor’s programs. After Sensei Funakoshi’s death in 1957 Sensei Nakayama took over the leadership of the JKA and remained its Chief Instructor until his death in 1987.

Sensei Safar has practiced Shotokan karate since 1958, and received his go-dan ranking from the JKA in 1980. Before establishing the AJKA in 1984 Safar Sensei was Okazaki Sensei's most senior student. In 1984, Sensei Safar along with Sensei Ray Dalke co-founded the AJKA-I.

Shotokan Karate is now practiced in almost every country of the world. Karate is widely studied by people of all ages and walks of life. Karate is taught in private clubs, in the armed forces and to police, in colleges, in factories, and in corporate physical fitness centers. From its humble beginnings Karate has become a world art.

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