

THE HISTORY OF KARATE

Karate arose from the development of Te and even had an Okinawan system named after them as “Chinese Hands”

It was practiced into the 19th century

By 1868, the systems of Kobudo and Te had a high degree of efficiency and both systems seem to have survived side by side often merging around the edges, in this year, Funakoshi Gichin was born. A rather sickly child, his parents did not expect him to live much beyond his teens, thus, his parents and grandparents seem to have lavished attention on him and at a very early age asked a family friend to teach him “Te”

Funakoshi studied “Chinese Hands” or “Karate” under two Masters, Ankoh Azato and Ankoh Itosu, it was Itosu who developed Pinan or Heian Kata as a method of teaching Karate to ever increasing numbers in the late 19th century. The Japanese Government introduced conscription into the armed forces,

The medical examiners found that many of the conscripts had good physiques. This led to the introduction of Karate into the physical education system and Kara-te’s secretive past was gone. Gichin Funakoshi, a schoolteacher by this time, was instrumental in developing the program.

A respected schoolteacher as well as a distinguished karateka, Funakoshi was asked to give a demonstration for the Crown prince Hirohito who stopped off in Okinawa before beginning a tour of Europe and the USA. This demonstration gave rise to others and Funakoshi was asked to demonstrate Karate in Tokyo in 1921.

At this time, he was instrumental in bringing about the change in Karate’s name, the ideogram used meaning “Chinese” (also pronounced Kara) was changed to the ideogram for Empty.

Thus, the more familiar name Karate – “Empty Hands” came into being. After this demonstration, Funakoshi was inundated with requests for information and instruction in the Art.

Thus, Mr Funakoshi abandoned plans to return to Okinawa and began accepting students in Tokyo,

Mr Funakoshi was a classical scholar as well as a karate Master and would write poetry under the pen name of “shoto” which means pine waves. He chose this name, as he would often go for walks in the pine forest that covered the slopes of Mount Torao in Okinawa.

Although the initial years in trying to establish Karate in Japan were tough.

Mr Funakoshi was fortunate in that university students and several businessmen became his students by 1936 there was enough money raised by the students to purchase a place of land and build the first purpose-built Karate Dojo.

In Japan Mr Funakoshi students call this building “shoto’s place” Shotokan.

Mr Funakoshi never called his Art anything except Karate but others, to classify Funakoshi style from the other styles that were making their way from Okinawa started calling his style the Shotokan Ryu or the style they practise at “shoto’s place”

Funakoshi’s second son yoshitaka, himself a student of karate, took on the main teaching role at the Shotokan and the lengthening of the stances is as credited to him as well as the introduction of “Fudo Dachi” – the rooted stance.