

## Karate, an Okinawan Art



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Okinawa is the main island of the Ryukyu Island chain stretching from Japan to Taiwan. It lies 300 nautical miles from Japan, 300 nautical miles from Taiwan and 400 from mainland China. It has an area of only 460 square miles.

The origins of Karate are the subject of much argument and debate, there have been many books written on the subject all with their own views and conclusions. What is clear is that the Okinawans practised fighting techniques based on a system called **Te** (hand or fist). There were regional variations of Te based around the main towns on the Island Shuri-Te, Naha-Te.

China had a great influence on Okinawa there was trade as well as cultural exchange and practitioners of Te were influenced by the more sophisticated styles of Chinese Boxing taking them back home and developing their style. Karate literally means Chinese Fist and had evolved by the 19th century. Over the years Okinawa has been occupied by the Chinese and by the Japanese Satsumas. During these times weapons carrying was forbidden, strengthening the desire to practice the hand arts. The Satsuma occupation ended in 1875 after which Okinawa became part of Japan.

Karate however was still not popular until 1904 when it was introduced into schools as a form of disciplined and focused exercise.



In 1922 Gichin Funakoshi, and others, went to Tokyo to demonstrate their Okinawan Karate. He was asked to return to Tokyo on a permanent basis to teach his methods.

At some point soon after, or slightly before, the kanji symbol for Chinese/foreign land (kara) was changed to the same sounding kanji symbol for empty (kara). Was this a cynical way of the government to distance themselves from the Chinese influence or because there was considerable discrimination against Okinawans in Japan. Or was it to reinforce the fact that this was combat/training without weapons. This is particularly interesting when we know that weapons training is part of Karate. Although there is no evidence of the Okinawans taking up arms against the

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Satsumas, apart from the initial invasion, there is much evidence that Okinawan Martial Arts were not just “empty handed”. Indeed many of the so called empty hand arts contain techniques derived from weapon techniques. While it was the upper classes that could afford bladed weapons there were and are many Arts that use simple weapons made from and inspired by everyday objects.

## Okinawan Karate Styles

-  Jukendo
-  Ryuei-ryu
-  Goju-ryu
-  Uechi-ryu
-  Pangai-Noon-ryu
-  Kojo-ryu
-  Matsumura Shorin-ryu
-  Ishmine-ryu
-  Tomari-te
-  Shorinji-ryu
-  Matsubayashi-ryu
-  Chuba Shorin-ryu
-  Isshin-ryu
-  Shorin-ryu(Shaolin)
-  Ryukyu Shorin-ryu
-  Shorin-ryu(Kobayashi)
-  Kushin-ryu
-  Kenwa Mabuni Shito-ryu
-  Shinpan Shiroma Shito-ryu
-  Okinawa Kempo
-  Tozan-ryu
-  Honshin-ryu
-  Yamani-ryu
-  Uhuchiku kobodo
-  Ryukyu kobodo
-  Matayoshi kobudo
-  Motobo-ryu
-  Bugeikan

## My Favorite Martial Art is Goju-ryu Karate



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