

The History of Karate

In early times, natives to the Ryukyu Islands developed a fighting system that was simply referred to as 'te'. The largest island in the Ryukyu chain is Okinawa Island, which is generally considered the birthplace of karate.

In 1372, trade relationships were established between the Ryukyu Islands and the Fujian Province of China, and this eventually spurred several Chinese families to move to Okinawa. These Chinese families began to share Chinese Kenpo with the native Okinawans they came in contact with, which was a blend of Chinese and Indian fighting styles. Through this, traditional Okinawan fighting techniques began to change, even if many families simply developed their own styles of martial arts in isolation. Still, there were three general styles that emerged and were named after the areas they developed—Shuri- te, Naha- te, and Tomari- te. The differences between the three styles were small and more about emphasis than anything else, as the cities of Shuri, Tomari, and Naha were all very close to one another.

The fact that weapons were banned in Okinawa in the 1400's by the invading Shimazu clan (Japanese clan) was a factor that spurred on the development of not only martial arts and karate in Okinawa, but also the use of inconspicuous farm tools as weapons.

As relations with China strengthened, the blend of the more traditional Okinawan fighting styles with those of Chinese Kenpo and the empty handed Chinese styles of Fujian White Crane, Five Ancestors, and Gangrou-quan, became more obvious. In addition, Southeast Asia influences were also brought into the fold, though perhaps to a lesser extent.

Sakukawa Kanga (1782-1838) was one of the first Okinawans to study in China. In 1806, he began teaching a martial art he called "Tudi Sakukawa," which translates to "Sakukawa of China Hand." One of Kanga's students, Matsumura Sokon (1809-1899), then taught a blend of te and Shaolin styles, which would later become known as Shorin-ryu. However, it is a student of Sokon's by the name of Itosu Anko (1831-1915) that is often called "the Grandfather of Karate." Itosu is known for creating simplified kata or forms for less advanced students and helped karate gain more mainstream acceptance. Along with this, he brought karate instruction to Okinawa's schools and the forms he developed are still used to a great extent today.

Extracted from the website *About.com: Martial Arts*

