

[The Link Between Southern Chinese Kung Fu and Okinawan Karate](#)

Two of the most popular disciplines of martial arts; Karate and Kung Fu, are sometimes used interchangeably. Although forms of each originate from similar styles of martial arts, Karate and Kung Fu are fundamentally different forms.

To understand Okinwan karate you have to understand the roots of the martial arts of southern China and their migration to Okinawa and the Ryukyu Islands. Okinawa was a satellite or vassal nation of China for over three hundred years. These close geopolitical and cultural relationships led to the migration of the southern Shaolin style that so strongly influenced Okinawan martial arts.

Chinese martial art falls into either a Northern Chinese or Southern Chinese style. The general differences between the Northern and Southern styles is that Northern styles have more legwork, acrobatics, and jumping moves. Southern Chinese kung fu systems focus more on short moves and stable stances.

Like in Kung Fu, with regards, to northern and southern Kung Fu there is a big difference between Okinawan and Japanese Karate, both in terms of philosophy, mindset, and application. Okinawa Karate is a martial art and a lifestyle. Japanese Karate tends to be more aggressive and linear in nature and uses deep and long stances.

Traditional Okinawan karate styles are heavily influenced by Southern Chinese martial arts and use a lot of circular movements for blocking, parrying and grappling. They are practices in a relaxed, fluid manner. Okinawan Karate uses more pressure points and fighting at close range. There are also some animal forms kata and techniques, and they put a lot of emphasis on breathing. Okinawan Karate is way less formal than its Japanese counterpart.

The fluid, circular movements in southern Kung fu and Okinawan karate are often imitations of the fighting styles of animals, initiated from one of five basic foot positions: normal upright posture and the four stances called dragon, frog, horse riding, and snake.

The origins of the styles of Kung Fu and Karate are what cause constant comparison between the two styles. Both school can be traced back to a Monk by his Indian name; Bodhiharma. This Monk is also considered to be the father of Zen. Buddhism adds to these origins.

The Southern Shaolin School of martial arts was born of the Shaolin Temple. The legend of the Shaolin fighting style is well known but it is important to distinguish the fact that there were two Shaolin Temples, a northern temple and a southern temple. The southern temple is the one that had the most influence on Okinawan karate's development. During the Ming period monks from the Shaolin Temple in

the North fled south as well and they eventually established a Southern Shaolin Temple in Fujian Province in Southern China.

According to legend, the Southern Shaolin Temple located in Fujian Province is where the southern style was developed. The southern Shaolin style consists of eighty percent hand techniques and twenty percent kicking techniques. Another distinguishing feature of the Southern Shaolin style is its emphasis on hand techniques for thrusting and chopping. Most martial arts historians agree that the martial arts techniques of the Southern Shaolin tradition were imported to Okinawa and greatly influenced the development of modern karate.

Most of Okinawa's contact with China was through Fujian province. Matsumura is considered a pioneer of the Okinawan martial arts. However, many generations before him, the arts were influenced by Chinese immigrants known as the Saposhi. Ming-dynasty officials sent 36 families to Okinawa to help with the island's development and relations with China. They taught the martial arts to the Okinawans as early as 1393 in a Chinese settlement called Kumemura.

Other teachers of karate in Okinawa preceded him, but Matsumura is widely regarded the organizer of the kata system and the nomenclature of modern karate. As the king's bodyguard and royal envoy, he traveled to Fuzhou several times, and it's believed that he studied at or at least visited one of the Shaolin Temples in Fujian. What's most interesting is that Matsumura brought a Shaolin white-crane master named Iwah back with him to Okinawa in the 1860s. Together, they taught the art to the locals.

Neither one system or style of martial art is superior to another. Some prefer kung fu and some prefer karate. Some ambitious martial artists who desire a full well rounded education practice both kung fu and karate.