

When looking at the development of the traditional Okinawan styles of Karate, we can gain a valuable insight into the art by illuminating some of the surrounding influences that played a significant part in shaping the culture of the Okinawan people.

Okinawa is a small island off of the southern tip of Japan. Te was practiced through out the land. In 1392, 36 families from China immigrated to Kume village in Naha, Okinawa. Each of these families were specialized in such a way as to cultivate the development of this tiny island. As they settled and their culture combined with the people of Okinawa, a new culture was born. The Okinawans, or Uchinanchu, grew into a courteous and peaceful race, distinct from both China and Japan. The settling of these families is undoubtedly how the Chinese fighting traditions were initially transmitted to Okinawa. Dai Sensei Meitoku Yagi can actually trace back his family's ancestral roots to this Kume settlement.

In 1609, the members of the Satsuma Clan invaded and conquered Okinawa for the Japanese empire. After this time, a ban on the possession of weapons by the Okinawan people was put into effect. This did a lot to encourage the development of an unarmed fighting art in Okinawa, which eventually turned into the different styles of traditional Karate we see today. However, since the Satsuma also banned martial arts training, students had to train in secret, often in the middle of the night in the back yards of their Sensei's home.

The Satsuma military occupation lasted nearly three centuries until 1879, when Okinawa became an official part of the Japanese empire.

With time, Karate became a more openly practiced art. It was no longer necessary to train in secret and around the turn of the twentieth century the martial arts were introduced into the island's school system as a form of physical exercise, due to the influence of Karate enthusiasts led by Itosu Anko. The Japanese felt that young men who acquired healthy bodies and good moral character through martial arts training would be more productive in the Japanese military culture.