

Midori Yama Budokai: *Hanshi's Corner*
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Ichigo, ichi e: One life, one meeting

Kyokushinkai Karate-do Yantsu Kata

Although most of Oyama Masutatsu, Sosai's kata are from his studies with Funakoshi Gichin, or Yamaguchi Gogen (with Oyama's modifications), there were a few indigenous to *Kyokushinkai*. Garyu, or Reclining Dragon, was created by Oyama, and named for his pen name. *Tsuki no Kata* was devised by one of Oyama's top students, Nakamura Sensei. However, *Yantsu* is believed to come from the village of Yansu in Fukien (Fujian) Province in China. It is thought to have been brought to Japan by Gokenki, who rarely taught it. There are very few groups outside of *Kyokushinkai* who use it (mostly those of Chinese *Kenpo*), but those groups have maintained a more Chinese version than is used by Oyama's organization. Also, Oyama's version is considerably shorter than others. One of *Yantsu's* unique features is that it consists of totally symmetric moves, using unique *koken*. *Yantsu* has been translated as "Safe Three," "To Maintain Purity" and "Eighth Light." "Safe Three," seems to be the closest literal translation (transliteration, if you prefer). One instructor refers to *Yantsu* as the "wall" *kata*, which emphasizes that its defenses are done as though your back were against the wall. It teaches good use of in-and out-fighting, simultaneous techniques, hand reversals and practice with both open (faster) and closed (safer) hand techniques, as well as the ability to switch between the two.

The first major sequence is palm to the front as the right hand performs *hikite*. The right hand then performs a lunge punch in *zenkutsu dachi*. This lunge punch is actually preceded by a sweep move with the left hand, to open the defense with *haito* against the opponent's inner arm. The opponent drops back into *neko ashi dachi* while using a dropping palm (*shotei otoshi uke*). This is immediately followed by a rising *koken* (bent wrist and a forward wrist reversal, which looks like, and is often confused with, *shuto sakotsu uchikomi* (driving knife-hand to the collar-bone). The entire sequence may be a release from an opponent who has gripped the wrist after the [attempted] lunge punch, although the dropping palm may be a block against a kick, followed by the grab. As mentioned above, the entire sequence is then repeated on the left side.

The second major sequence consists of three punches, followed by a *haito*-like move, a *mae geri* and a repetition of the dropping palm, rising *koken* and forward "*shuto*." The punches are evident. Withdrawing into the cat stance you are performing *uchi uke*, with the hand in the "rolling ball block" position found in *Tensho* (reminiscent of T'ai Chi Ch'uan's "holding the ball!"). The rest of the sequence is as for the first sequence given.

When asked a question concerning *kata*, Oyama Sosai stated: "To answer your question, practice that a thousand more times."

Bunkai

Bunkai literally means "analysis" or "disassembly." Within martial arts it refers to application of fighting techniques taken from various *kata*. In addition to interpreting moves within the form, *bunkai* also improves technique by learning to adjust distance (*ma-ai*), time the moves properly (*hyoshi*) and adapt a technique depending on the size of

the opponent (*henka*). *Bunkai* should include four applications for each move, or series of moves. These would include a release, a lock or choke, a throw and a percussive attack. Note these applications form a continuum of force. To truly understand *bunkai* one must observe the moves preceding and following the main technique. *Toridai* refers to techniques not readily seen, and *himitsu* refers to techniques that are hidden within the *kata*. *Shuto uke* would be an example of the first, as it may be a joint-lock or throw, and the application of a stance as a takedown would be an example of the second. How does one extract *bunkai*; what does your *kata* “tell” you? First, decide on the application you wish to use. This is based on large part by the question, “Do the movements I use strongly resemble those used in the *kata*?” If not, then the application is probably not correct. After all, the old masters designed the form as a template for combat! Once the application is chosen, the second thing is to test or “prove” the technique. We use the expression: “The exception proves the rule,” without understanding its meaning. The old definition of “prove” simply meant to “test,” without the meaning of being correct. The main test is, does the *bunkai* actually work, or is just the compliance of the person with whom I’m working? This is particularly important when the “opponent” is considerably larger and/or stronger! Third, have others try your concept on different “opponents,” to find if it only works for you, or if it may be applied universally. Fourth, all participants must be as honest and open as possible. If anyone has a question concerning the technique’s validity, it needs to be re-tested. I would suggest *kakiwake uke* as a starting point. This is in many *kata*, including the *Heian*, and is usually taught as a method of releasing a two-handed grip from inside the opponent’s arms. Try this with even a moderately strong opponent, or against moderate resistance, and you will find that it does not work! Applied in this manner, the exponent is using the weakest muscles against the opponent’s strongest muscles. To understand what is actually being done, the exponent has to be aware of the “chamber” of the arms, prior to actual application. It is not the technique which is incorrect, but its application. What I have given is an adaptation of the method of problem solving, as it relates to *kata*. Just as with *bunkai*, it is nothing new, but an adaptation of that which already exists.

"*Kata* is meant to help a student to gain a better understanding of *karate*, while *bunkai* is meant to help a student to gain a better understanding of *kata*." Peter Lindsay, *Godan, Sensei*.

Learning *Kata*

Learning *kata* is done in four major learning sequences, which are given as follows.

Omote refers to doing the *kata* as learned. That is, moving from a technique begun to the left and continuing back to the beginning ready posture. This is usually continued until at least the level of *Shodan*.

Ura refers to doing the *kata* in the reverse direction. That is, if *omote* begins on the left, then begin *ura* to the right, continuing to the beginning ready posture. With exceptional students, this usually begins at about *Nidan* level.

Go refers to doing the *kata* from the end to the beginning; that is, beginning with the last move and moving backwards to the first move of the *omote* version. With the exceptional student, this begins at about *Sandan*.

Ura go means to begin with the reverse form of the last move and continue to the reverse form of the first move. *Yodan* should be the level this study is begun.

Kata henka uses the above methods, but includes kicks prior to hand techniques. For example *Heian Shōdan kata henka omote* would begin as usual with *gedan barai*, but prior to *oi zuki*, *migi mae geri* would be done. When turning, an *ushiro geri* would precede the next down block. As the right arm is withdrawn, a *mae geri keage* (to the opponent's elbow) could be performed with the front leg. This level of the study of *kata* should never be done prior to *Godan*.

One definition of *kata* is: "A traditional *kata* is a collection of fighting techniques done in the air to be used against commonly seen acts of violence."

Antei or Balance

The definition of "balance," is "the ability to maintain and control the position and motion of the total center of body mass relative to the base of support." In order to maintain balance the "Human Balance System" consists of three parts. They are as follows.

- First is the vestibular system (inner ear) which is the most important element of human balance. Its main function is maintaining balance (posture and equilibrium) by monitoring the motion of the head and stabilizing the eyes relative to the surrounding environment. Within the inner ear are three canals that contain a gel-like liquid called endolymph and tiny hair cells, which when working properly give the brain information through the central nervous system about linear and angular positions of the body with respect to gravity.
- Second is the visual system which gives information concerning depth, velocity, and motion perception from the eyes to the brain relative to other objects. The eyes work in conjunction with the ears to maintain balance, as well as maintain clear vision during movements. This is because the inner ear continuously sends impulses that adjust your eyes in coordination to the smallest movement of the body.
- Third is the somatic sensory or somatosensory system which provides the brain with two valuable pieces of internal and external spatial information to help maintain balance. These two systems are called, proprioception and exteroception. Proprioception involves proprioceptors, or internal sensors in the body that give the central nervous system information about the movement of body parts in relation to other parts of the body. This process is often referred to as "kinesiological awareness." Exteroception involves exteroceptors or pressure sensors located in your feet and hands. These provide external spatial information about the topography of the ground or support surface.

When these three parts work together, one "has [physical] balance." Your *hanshi meiyō kyōju* emphasizes "physical," as one should be balanced, mentally, emotionally and spiritually as well. When any of these are missing, the exponent (or opponent) is "off-balanced."

Miscellaneous

Kōsa dachi is a cross-legged stance, as in *Tekki kata*. One school uses the word "*kusure* (not *kuzure!*)," as in "*kusure kōsa dachi*" to refer to a "female horse-riding stance." If any of you have any more information on this, your *hanshi meiyō kyōju* would appreciate elucidation. He can only presume this is a reference to western women riding side-saddle.

.Kwannon is the oriental sainté of mercy. She is often equated with the Virgin Mary. To discover why she is, recite (or have someone recite for you) the “Hail Mary.”

Pingan is the old name for *Pinan*, which became *Heian* in Japanese. Tang Soo Do in Korea uses Pyong-an for these hyung (*kata*).

Ken fat is the Cantonese way of saying kenpo (Japanese) or ch’uan fa (Mandarin)

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