

SANCHIN

The study of Okinawan Goju-ryu karate offers a myriad of techniques as well as limitless spiritual and mental development to its practitioners. The basis of Shorei-kan (school for respecting courtesy and manners) Okinawan Goju-ryu is founded upon the pursuit of body and mind unification and is exemplified in the *sanchin* kata.

The renowned founder of Goju-ryu, Chojun Miyagi, was a student of Kanryo Higashionna. The name "Goju-ryu" was given to the Naha-te style by Miyagi at the 1929 National Martial Arts Convention in Kyoto, Japan. Miyagi's senior student at that time was Seikichi Toguchi, who remained with Miyagi until his death; Toguchi now heads my own style, the Shorei-kan Okinawan Goju-ryu system, maintaining the principles set forth by his teacher. Toshio Tamano, senior student of Toguchi, was responsible for bringing Shorei-kan karate to the United States some 11 years ago. Recently Tamano relocated to Italy in order to introduce the Shorei-kan system there, and left Ichiro Naito in charge of the system in the United States.

The Japanese martial arts have historically been deeply related to Zen Buddhism, their ultimate function being to bring one to a "state of enlightenment." To achieve this goal, there are basically two methods: "dynamic" or "standing zen," and "passive" or "sitting zen." Both approach the same goal, but through different methodologies. In order to develop strength, control and discipline, Chinese zen (*chan*) monks and Japanese swordsmen had in common the method of dynamic zen. Eventually this dynamic system of energy, focusing coordination with physical exertion, was developed into the unique method of martial arts training known as *sanchin*.

The Fukien province in China is mainly credited with the origination of *sanchin*. Though there are discrepancies in the record today as to how many versions existed, the most influential on Goju-ryu was the *kingai*

version. This was the form of *sanchin* which Chojun Miyagi adapted to the Okinawan Goju-ryu system, emphasizing the harder aspects of the kata. Miyagi later also developed the open-handed form known as *tensho*. *Tensho* employs the same *sanchin* breathing techniques but differs in that soft, circular motions are used. The wealthy Miyagi was able to travel many times to China to learn, develop and adapt the *sanchin* kata for use in his homeland.

Sanchin is the common thread which binds many varied styles. Goju-ryu stylists, be they Japanese, Okinawan or Chinese, all practice some form of *sanchin*. Components of kata *sanchin* have also been adapted by non-Goju styles. For example, a variation of *sanchin* breathing can be found in both Isshin-ryu and Shorin-ryu.

The basic elements of *sanchin* consist of the following:

1. Correct breathing
2. Correct posture (low center of gravity)
3. Variation of techniques (correct muscular tension)
4. Actual combat application

The fundamental basis of *sanchin* is breathing. *Sanchin* breathing is performed slowly and powerfully, while concentrating internal energy (*ki*) in the lower abdomen (in the *tanden*, located approximately one-and-one-half inches below the navel). While practicing this breathing method, inhalation is done through the nose while exhalation is done through the mouth. Due to its powerful nature, this breathing is quite audible. The sounds of inhaling and exhaling provide a reference point for the practitioner to coordinate breathing with the execution of various techniques. Concentration on this type of breathing is fundamental to both active and passive zen. The intensity of the breath is often considered proportional to the dynamics of the zen being practiced.

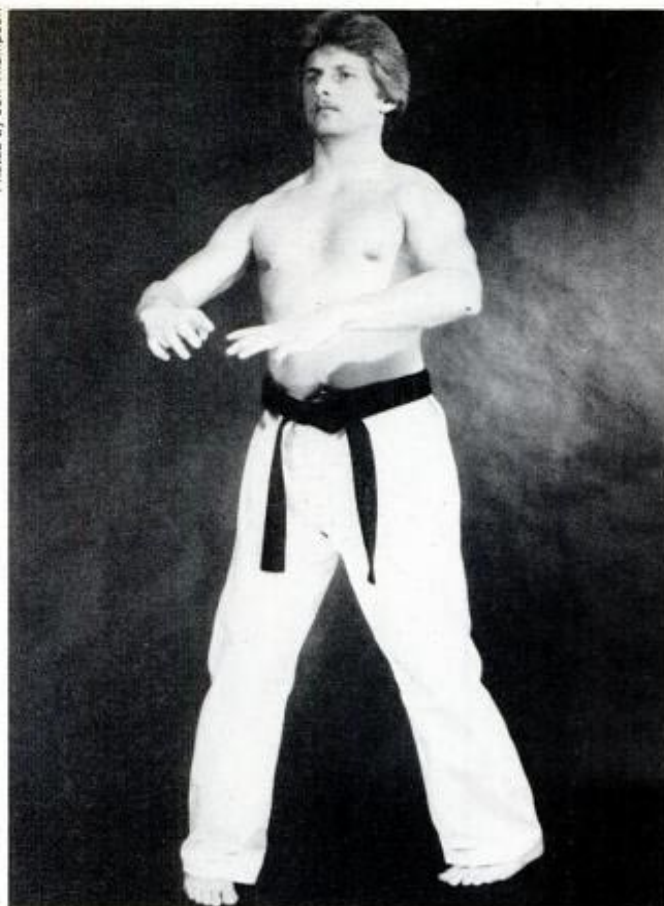
While breathing, it is important to put sufficient strength in the lower abdomen. This technique provides

GOJU KATA OF HEALTH

by Scott Lenzi

Throughout the kata, the shoulders (at right) should remain down to avoid painful damage since the impact of a punch travels back up the arm and is compensated for by the shoulders. In the sequence below, without a partner, the grab (1) is followed by the twist (2) and pull (3). With a partner, the grab (4) is followed by the twist and pull (5) and a double palm and heel strike (6).





powerful contractions which strengthen the abdominals and external obliques (muscles located on the side of the body). These contractions are a result of the exhaling phase, where the abdominals, in an effort to squeeze out every last cubic inch of air, contract strongly. The conditioning of the abdominals through sanchin breathing will maintain a healthy functioning of the vital organs, a high metabolic rate and an overall increase in energy.

By its very nature, this method of breathing utilizes and expands the entire lung capacity. When inhaling, the stomach protrudes. The breath is initiated essentially in the lower abdomen, more specifically at the center of gravity. Following this procedure, the lungs are filled from the bottom up, much like filling a glass of water. In this way more blood cells will be oxygenated per breath. Increased lung capacity along with improved circulation are subsequent benefits.

This method of breathing also induces a relaxed state, helping to relieve daily stress. Concentration on the rhythmic breathing provides a single focal point, thereby eliminating distractions for the duration of the kata. Furthermore, utilization of sanchin breathing in a disagreeable or threatening situation will provide the foundation for a relaxed, spontaneous reaction instead of a potentially dangerous reflex action. As an ancient saying goes, "A sword in the scabbard is a weapon beyond compare." To keep the sword sheathed requires both mental discipline and relaxation.

Another important aspect of sanchin is that of correct posture and stance. During the exhaling phase of sanchin, the legs are tensed while in torsion, bringing the pelvis forward and strengthening the major muscle groups of the legs and pelvic area via a pseudo-isometric process. This tension is implemented with every major muscle group throughout the kata.

The stance utilized throughout sanchin is known as *kihon*, or *sanchin*

The chest punch and soft outward chest block are performed constantly during the first or closed hand phase of the kata. The demonstrator on the right (1) first punches then deflects (2) softly the counterpunch and (3) launches the final counterattack.



The hiki uke is a block utilizing the circular motion practiced in sanchin. It is designed to be used in close range and is a soft block. In the solo sequence, the practitioner rotates (1) the wrist and deflects (2). Then with a partner he again rotates (3) and deflects (4).



In the three photos at right, to insure correct skeletal and muscular alignment, the practitioner is struck by key points. The strike is performed at the completion of the exhale when maximum tension is required. This striking is also essential in developing intense focus.





dachi. Adapted and further developed by Miyagi, the sanchin stance provides the foundation of Okinawan Goju-ryu. Sanchin dachi is also known as the "three opponent" or "three battle" stance. Due to its triangular alignment, the practitioner is balanced and braced to receive an attack from any direction. By keeping the center of gravity low, one's body weight is centered in the stance. From the basic laws of biomechanics, so long as body weight remains centered, balance is maintained.

Two other common stances utilized in the Goju system are *zen* and *shikodachi* (horse stance). Both of these stances rely on rectilinear motion of the feet. Any straight line motion with a force applied perpendicularly can easily be put into a state of imbalance.

Due to its alignment, sanchin dachi employs circular motion. The feet maintain the established angle while circling 180 degrees. During this motion the feet brush along the floor, never losing contact with it. This will

always provide the opportunity, if necessary, to quickly plant the foot that is in motion.

The third major element of sanchin is that of the slow, powerful execution of techniques. These techniques include both open- and closed-hand blocks and strikes. Throughout the kata at the point of exhalation and increased overall muscular tension, the practitioner is struck at key points. This striking is performed by an experienced instructor who seeks to determine if the muscles are in correct alignment. Correct alignment of musculature will ensure the maximum power. Additionally, the minor pain associated with this striking forces the student to sharpen his focus while performing this martial arts training.

Sanchin is a training method with several practical combat applications. The initial phase of sanchin uses a straight *chudan tsuki* (chest punch) followed by a decisive, somewhat soft, closed-hand chest block. The block is performed with the punching hand. When punching in sanchin, the fist is twisted so as to allow the two large knuckles to be the striking surface. When applying a given force, the smaller the area of delivery, the more concentrated the impartation of energy. The intensity is analogous to a beam of light focused through a magnifying glass. The block is soft, though from watching the kata, it would appear to be quite the opposite. The block is initiated from the wrist. By simply twisting the wrist, the elbow will be drawn inward, producing an outward circular chest block. The motion creates a very precise, soft and efficient block which is designed to be executed at close

range.

This technique exemplifies the essence of Okinawan Goju-ryu—minimal energy expenditure (i.e., utilizing the opponent's momentum) and counterattacking at close range. Needless to say, this in-close type of fighting requires a great deal of technical proficiency. To fight in close, one must develop a very relaxed mental composure. The difficulty in developing this composure comes from our upbringing. For example, having a discussion with someone who has his face right next to yours can be quite intimidating. Constant training is required to overcome this natural aversion.

Close range also influences the Goju-ryu kicks. The major targets are groin, knee and instep. The power developed through the practice of sanchin enables the practitioner to deliver tremendously powerful kicks. These kicks are designed to incapacitate the opponent.

Circular motion is essential to Goju-ryu and is somewhat developed in kata sanchin. Two open-hand blocks, *hiki uke* and *hirai uke*, are designed to culminate in a grab. This grab is part of the flowing circular block and, via the grab, efficiently utilizes the opponent's momentum. The grabbing motion is performed during the second phase of the kata. The pseudo-isometric action of sanchin develops grabbing power and dexterity.

The front double-lapel grab executed in sanchin makes use of a twisting motion with the grab. This twist in effect "locks in" the opponent's clothing. The following motion is an open-hand strike with two major applications. The first is a double-



The sanchin or "three battle" stance is the foundation of kata sanchin. Note with the triangular alignment of the stance how the body weight, incorporated at the center of gravity, is centered at the geometric center of the stance. The balance is maintained as long as this alignment is not upset.






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ridge hand strike to the ribs. The second variation, the more advanced, is a strike utilizing the fingertips. The target area is the soft sheath of muscle located below the solar plexus and extending along the lower rib cage.

The techniques utilized in sanchin are not flashy tournament-winning motions. However, in an actual self-defense situation, they are simple, effective and incapacitating. A large percentage of the situations encountered on the street are medium to close range. The U.S. Special Forces as well as other military action units rely heavily on Goju-ryu techniques because of their unglamorous practicality.

A word about the location where sanchin should be practiced. Though the practice of sanchin is beneficial anywhere, maximum benefits are attained by practicing on a hardwood floor. Carpeting, found in many dojo, provides too much friction. The balance on a rug comes from gripping the carpet instead of emanating from the tanden.

A hardwood floor is the perfect training aid. It forces the practitioner to gather balance from the center of gravity, with nothing to "grab." As the practitioner sweats, another barrier to balance appears. The wet floor now has an even lower coefficient of friction. The combination of being struck, a slippery floor and nothing to grip allows for the development of tremendous balance and strength. Dealing with these influences gives the sanchin practitioner the experience to deal more effectively with variables encountered in the street. Snow, ice, gravel and the like do not pose insurmountable obstacles.

This unique training method, when practiced with regularity, offers the practitioner increased physical strength, improved general health, and a sharpened focus of internal energy (ki). And sanchin does not have to be limited to martial arts preparation. It does not take much time or space and can serve as an important supplement to any training. ✕

About the Author: Scott Lenzi, a student of Toshio Tamano, is the assistant Shorei-kan U.S. representative and chief instructor of the Buchanan Dojo in Buchanan, New York. He holds a third dan in karate and a shodan in kobudo.



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