

A: Goju Ryu Kata**Sanchin (三戦)**

Sanchin – ‘three battles’ – is so called because its purpose is to enable the karateka to overcome three kinds of weakness: of body, mind and will. Especially when practised in conjunction with the ‘shime’ (締め) method of training it will produce a stable, rooted posture, strengthen the muscular, nervous and respiratory systems, and concentrate the practitioner’s strength in the ‘hara’ (腹): the abdomen. Sanchin kata is Chinese in origin, originating in the Fujian White Crane tradition, and exists in a number of variants. Goju Ryu uses a longer version, often called Sanchin dai (三戦大: ‘large Sanchin’) and a shorter one called Sanchin sho (三戦小: ‘small Sanchin’). The longer is attributed to Higaonna Kanryo and the shorter to Miyagi Chojun. The longer has two 180° turns; the shorter simply moves forward and back. Originally Sanchin was practised with open hands (as it still is in Uechi Ryu). The tense closed-fist ‘push’ now used in Goju Ryu is said to have been introduced by Higaonna Kanryo’s student Kyoda Juhatsu. The Uechi Ryu version is closer to the Chinese version, with quick ‘snake-like’ spear hand (nukite: 貫手) strikes.

It is said that Goju Ryu karate begins and ends with Sanchin. It is important to learn it from a teacher who has thoroughly understood the correct methods of stance and movement.

Tensho (転掌)

Tensho kata is complementary to Sanchin, and equally important to the student. It combines the strong, concentrated ‘hara’-centred posture of Sanchin with the large flowing circular hand movements characteristic of Goju Ryu: ‘Tensho’ is ‘turning/rotating palms.’ It was composed by Miyagi Chojun in about 1921 with the intention of balancing the tension or hardness of Sanchin with an element of suppleness or softness. In this sense, Tensho is perhaps the quintessential ‘go/ju’ – ‘hard/soft’ – kata, and it must be carefully studied with this interplay in mind. It is influenced by traditional Okinawan body movements and the Kakufa kata of Higaonna/Gokenki. It may be distantly related to the form called Rokkishu (六手: ‘six hands’) described in the *Bubishi*; also, Tensho looks like a highly simplified version of the Wing Chun form called Sil Lim Dao, which is itself related to the Fujian Crane systems.

Sanchin and Tensho kata are customarily called heishugata (閉手形) (‘closed hand kata’); the rest are kaishugata (開手形) (‘open hand kata’). These terms bear no relation to the way in which the kata are performed. They seem to have been intended to mean that the heishugata are esoteric (i.e. not given with an ‘open hand’

to all comers), whereas the kaishugata are as it were the exoteric or 'public' kata of Goju Ryu. This is not, however, a distinction that is observed in modern Goju Ryu teaching.

Gekisai (撃碎)

Goju Ryu has two elementary or beginners' kata, called Gekisai dai ichi (撃碎第一) or Gekisai shodan (撃碎初段), and Gekisai dai ni (撃碎第二) or Gekisai nidan (撃碎二段). Gekisai dai ichi was devised by Miyagi Chojun in 1940, at the request of the Governor of Okinawa who invited him to develop a kata that might promote the study of karate by the young. Nagamine Shoshin ((長嶺 将真) (1907 – 1997) was asked to develop a similar kata; the result was the Fukyugata ichi (普及型一) now practised in Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu. Miyagi Chojun composed the more challenging Gekisai dai ni subsequently, building on the foundation of the earlier one: Gekisai dai ni/nidan introduces the student to neko ashi dachi (猫足立) and mawashi uke (回し受け). The Gekisai kata are basic, but the difficulty of learning them should not be underestimated. Gekisai is 'attack and break' or 'defeat and crush.'

(Other teachers have devised empty-hand kata called Gekisai sandan and Gekisai yodan for purposes of their own, but these are not practised in Yuzenkai. In Yuzenkai, Gekisai sandan, yodan and godan are the names used for kobudo kata, for sai, tonfa and kama respectively).

Saifa(獅子法)

Omoto Shihan prefers to write the name of this kata as 獅子法(獅法), which is 'lion combat method.' It is more usually written as 最破 ('extreme destruction') or 碎破 ('smash and destroy'). As is true of so many kata, the actual origins of Saifa are obscure. It is said by some to have been brought from China by Higaonna Kanryo; others believe it to be an ancient Nahate kata that Miyagi Chojun learnt from Motobu Choyu. Its Chinese ancestry is clear enough: the double punch that occurs in it is characteristic of southern Chinese Lion Boxing; it also contains elements of White Crane combat methods. Saifa kata emphasises moving outside an opponent's line of attack while reducing distance. The final technique of the kata is hadaka shime (裸絞め), a lethal choke-hold that can separate the brain-stem and spinal cord. The traditional Saifa kata differs somewhat from the version more recently created by the WKF and JKF for competition purposes.

Seienchin (青鷹戰)

Omoto Shihan prefers to write Seienchin as 青鷹戰, which is 'blue hawk combat': the kata incorporates a number of hawk-like grasping, holding and pulling techniques intended to unbalance, grapple and throw. It can also be written as 征遠戰 ('combat with the barbarian enemy') and, more usually, 制引戰 ('combat by controlling and pulling'). Seienchin kata trains the practitioner to move swiftly and fluently in different directions in shiko dachi (四股立). Seienchin is one of the three traditional Goju kata (Sanchin and Tensho are the other two) in which there are no explicit kicking techniques. It seems likely that Miyagi Chojun learnt Seienchin during his travels in China, or synthesised it from techniques that he acquired both in China and Okinawa. Various authorities suggest that it is related to Hsing-I or to the Eagle or Hawk systems of Chinese boxing.

Sanseru (三十六)

Sanseru – 'thirty-six' – is one of several kata with names that are factors of 108: a number with complex symbolic significance in Buddhist thought. The name does not mean that Sanseru contains 36 techniques (though it is also said that Feng Yiquan, who lived during the Ming Dynasty (1522-67), developed the kata, or a forerunner of it, as a method of using thirty-six vital points to defeat his opponents). Sanseru kata contains techniques for attack and defence using both hands simultaneously, and techniques for synchronizing hand and foot in low kicks. Versions of Sanseru are found in the Crane, Tiger and Dog styles of Chinese Boxing. It is traditionally supposed that Miyagi Chojun learnt Sanseru from Higaonna Kanryo, but there is reason to think that Higaonna Kanryo did not himself teach it and that Miyagi Chojun learnt it in China after Higaonna Kanryo's death. The Sanseru kata practised in Uechi Ryu is quite different from the Goju Ryu version.

Sisouchin (蟋蟀戰)

Sisochin, written as 蟋蟀戰 by Omoto Shihan, is 'cricket fight': a reference to the Chinese game of making two male crickets fight one another with bets on the outcome (the male cricket is noted for its aggressiveness and persistence). This perhaps suggests a kinship with the southern Chinese Mantis systems. It is more often written as 四向戰, which is 'combat in four directions.' Possibly the 四 ('four') is meant as a reference to the four 'elements' that feature in Chinese metaphysics and medicine: wood, fire, metal and water. Sisouchin kata contains locking techniques, escapes from 'bear-hugs' from behind, and several throwing techniques. It is unusual in that it begins with swift nukite strikes similar to those found in the Uechi Ryu version of Sanchin kata. Sisochin is usually thought to have originated in either

the Dragon or Tiger Shaolin arts, while others regard it as being related to Okinawan White Crane methods.

Sesan (十三)

Sesan – ‘thirteen’ – is considered by some to be the oldest of kata of all. It is certainly very widespread. Wado ryu, Seibukan Shorin Ryu, Isshin Ryu and Uechi Ryu all have versions of it, as does Shotokan, though the Shotokan version was renamed Hangetsu (半月: ‘half-moon’) by Funakoshi Gichin ((船越 義珍) (1868 – 1957). These all differ significantly from one another, and all seem to be related to an older kata now called Aragaki-no Sesan, named after Aragaki Seisho (新垣 世璋) (1840 – 1918), who was Higaonna Kanryo’s first teacher. It is said to be one of the four kata brought back from China by Higaonna Kanryo, though it seems likely that he also learnt a version of it from Aragaki Seisho. Perhaps Sesan is so named as containing thirteen different kinds of technique; alternatively, the name possibly originates from the fact that ‘thirteen’ is a symbol representing strength in Okinawan and Chinese culture. Sesan kata trains strong punches, kicks and grasping techniques, and it contains many hidden techniques.

Sepai (十八)

Sepai is ‘eighteen’ but, as with Sanseru kata, the name does not refer to the number of techniques contained in it; again, 18 is a factor of 108. Sepai kata contains numerous techniques (often hidden) of long-distance and close-quarter combat, and utilises movement in four directions and 45° angular attacks. It was a particular favourite of Toguchi Seikichi (渡口 政吉) (1917–1998). Sepai is usually thought to come from the Tiger or Tiger/Crane Shaolin systems, though the distinguished karate researcher Akio Kinjo (*Karate Denshinroku: Okinawa*, Tosho Center, 1999) believes that it belongs to the Dragon Shaolin tradition.

Kururunfa 臥龍法

According to the orthography favoured by Omoto Shihan, 臥龍法 is ‘dragon method’; the movements and behaviour of the dragon can be seen in this kata, and Akio Kinjo believes that its origins lie in the Dragon Shaolin system. A more usual orthography is 久留頓破(‘holding on long and destroying suddenly’); another alternative is 来留破, which is a meaningless homophone of the Chinese pronunciation. Kururunfa is distinguished by rapid and dynamic stance changes, close-quarter grappling and the heavy feeling ‘sticking’ or adhesion known as mochimi (餅身). Joint techniques and throws are more evident in this kata than in Sepai.

Suparinpei (一百零八)

Suparinpei is 'One hundred and eight' – again, not as representing the number of techniques in the kata, but using the number 108 as a symbol for infinity. Suparinpei is the longest and – despite an apparent simplicity in execution – the most comprehensive Goju Ryu kata. Its hidden techniques, transitions and changes of pace require a great deal of effort to master. Some teachers say that Pechurin (百歩連), 'One hundred step sequence,' is an alternative name for Suparinpei; but, despite certain similarities, Pechurin and Suparinpei are separate and different kata. It has been suggested that Pechurin was the kata originally taught by Higaonna Kanryo to Kyoda Juhatsu and that it perhaps forms the basis of the Suparinpei later developed by Miyagi Chojun (though it may also be that Miyagi learnt his Suparinpei kata elsewhere).

B: THE 'HEIAN' KATA

There are five Heian (平安) kata: Shodan (初段) Nidan (二段) (Sandan (三段) Yodan (四段) and Godan (五段). There are also older and less elaborate versions of the same kata (practised in Wado Ryu and other schools) called Pinan: an alternative pronunciation of the same kanji. The meaning in both cases is 'peace' or 'tranquillity'.

The Pinan/Heian family originates with Itosu Anko (糸洲 安恒) (1831–1915), a student of Matsumura Sokon (松村 宗棍) (ca.1798–1890). Itosu was the earliest karate teacher to promote the study of the art outside the traditional model of a closely supervised personal relationship – often a 'live-in' relationship – between teacher and pupil. His project was to introduce the study of karate into the Okinawan secondary school system, and in pursuance of this he devised the series of simplified kata called Pinan as being suitable for use by young students. It seems that the Pinan kata were abridged from the much longer Kushanku (公相君) and Chiang Nan/Channan (澹南) kata that Itosu learnt from Matsumura. Channan kata is said to have been learnt by Matsumura Sokon from a Chinese teacher called Chiang Nan – variously described as a soldier or diplomat – who had visited Okinawa in the middle of the nineteenth century. The original Channan kata is apparently lost, though it is thought to be the ancestor or prototype of several contemporary kata. The Pinan/Heian kata are incorporated in the long kata called Kanku dai (観空大) or Kushanku that is still practised. The pronunciation 'Heian' was adopted by Funakoshi Gichin, who also slightly changed the order (Pinan Nidan is called Heian Shodan, and Pinan Shodan is called Heian Nidan). The Heian kata were given their present form (by Funakoshi Osensei's son Funakoshi Yoshitaka (船越義豪) (1906-1945).