

Auckland West Goju ryu Karate Club

Sanchin - "Three Battles/Conflicts"

One of two "heishu " Kata of Goju-Ryu, Sanchin is probably the most misunderstood Kata in all of Karate. In contrast, it is probably the single most valuable training exercise in Goju-Ryu. Like the other Kata of Goju-Ryu, Sanchin can be found in several Chinese arts (*San Jan*), particularly the southern styles including four styles of Crane Boxing, Dragon Boxing, Tiger Boxing, Lion Boxing, Dog or Ground Boxing and Monk Fist. Sanchin has such aspects as deep, diaphragmatic breathing found in many internal arts as well as external attributes like mechanical alignment and muscular strength. Because many martial artists have little or no understanding of the true history and nature of the Chinese arts from which Okinawan Goju-Ryu has its roots, Sanchin has become little more than an isometric form performed with dangerous tension and improper breathing techniques.



The original Sanchin that Higaonna Sensei learned from RuRuKo (1852-1930) was performed with open hands and with less emphasis on muscle contraction and "energetic" breathing. With the changes brought about by Emperor Meiji (Meiji Restoration Period 1888-1912), Higaonna Sensei changed the open hands to closed fists as the martial meaning was no longer emphasized. Later Miyagi Sensei would again alter the Kata in pattern alone.

Sanchin translates as "3 Battles" or "3 Conflicts". This has many meanings. First it refers to the struggle to control the body under physical fatigue. With fatigue the mind begins to lose focus and thus the spirit begins to diminish as well. Therefore, Sanchin develops discipline, determination, focus, perseverance and other mental attributes. The Chinese refer to this as Shen (spirit), Shin (mind) and Li (body). Another possible interpretation refers to the "Three Burners" of the body as described in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM).

Gekisai Ichi / Gekisai Ni - "Attack & Destroy"

The Gekisai Kata were formulated by Chojun Miyagi Sensei in 1940 as a form of physical exercise for high school boys and to help popularize Goju-Ryu among the public of Okinawa. In 1948, after WWII, Miyagi Sensei began to teach the Gekisai Kata in depth as a regular part of Goju-Ryu in his own dojo. Until this



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time, *Sanchin* was the first Kata taught in Goju-Ryu. *Sanchin* is physically and mentally a demanding Kata and requires a great deal of time and patience to learn and perform properly. The *Gekiaai* Kata however are easier to learn and perform and contain dynamic techniques which are more attractive to young people. These Kata contain the same kanji for "sai" found in *Saifa*. This would suggest that even though these Kata were designed primarily as a form of exercise, Miyagi Sensei included his understanding of combat as part of their makeup.

Saifa - "Smash and Tear Apart"



Saifa is the first of the classical combative Kata taught in Goju-Ryu. Goju-Ryu's Kata origins come from the martial arts taught in the Fuzhou area of southern China, largely Crane and Xingyi/Baqua as well as other internal and external martial arts. Kanryo Higaonna Sensei was taught this Kata, along with the other Kata of Goju-Ryu, while he studied in China from 1863-1881 under the direction of RuRuKo (*Xie Zhongxiang* in Chinese) and others. These Kata and martial strategies would become the basis of the the *quanfa* of Higaonna Sensei, which later Miyagi Sensei would call Goju-Ryu. From an understanding of the grappling and striking techniques of this Kata, *Saifa* can be interpreted to mean grabbing and tearing of tissue in close-quartered combat.

Seiyunchin - "Control/Suppress and Pull"



The name *Seiyunchin* implies the use of techniques to off balance, throw and grapple. It is this understanding that imparts the original intentions of the Kata of Naha-te before the sport alignment of modern Karate. *Seiyunchin* contains close-quartered striking, sweeps, take-downs and throws. Though the Kata itself is void of kicks, many practitioners make the grave mistake by missing the opportunity to apply any leg technique. Though almost invisible to the untrained eye, the subtleness of "ashi barai" and "suri ashi" can represent foot sweeps, parries and traps.

Sanseru - "36 Hands"



Sanseru is unique as Miyagi Sensei studied this Kata under a direct student of RuRuKo during his studies in Fuzhou, China beginning in 1916. *Sanseru*, from its numerical designation, would seem to have its roots in Buddhism. This is not to infer that there is a religious connection or implication with this Kata or Karate, but simply that Buddhism was a part of the culture of the people of that time. It should also be noted that numbers had a very important role in the language of the more ancient Chinese before the invention of kanji.

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A more realistic explanation of this and the other numerically named Kata is that they refer to a systematic method and understanding of certain groupings of vital acupressure points. It is this science that the martial arts were based upon and developed.

Feng Yiquan, who lived during the Ming Dynasty (1522-67) developed this particular method of using variations of "36" forbidden points to defeat his opponents. Other disciples of Feng created other quans expanding the number to 72 and ultimately 108.

Sanseru is found in the following styles of Chinese Boxing: Crane, Tiger, and Dog

Shisochin - "Four Directions/Gates of Conflict/Attack"

Shisochin translates as "Four Gates" or "Four Directions of Conflict". To leave it at that discounts a truer understanding. The third kanji is the same found in Sanchin and Seiyunchin, which translates as "battle" or "conflict". This lends to a deeper definition of its meaning. The idea of four directions can come from the performance of the four shotei in four directions. It can also represent the four elements represented in Chinese medicine (Acupuncture is one) of Wood, Fire, Metal and Water with man representing Earth. Since this was the science and culture of that period in China when Higaonna and Miyagi both studied in Fuzhou, it would be a great oversight to discount this aspect as a very probable explanation of the Kata's name and martial intent.

Sepai - "18 Hands"

The reference to "18" in naming this Kata has a couple of interpretations. Like Sanseru, there is suggested a connection to Buddhist philosophy. Another insinuates "18 guards for the King". The most apparent and most meaningful in the naming of Sepai is again from the martial arts development and the use of attacking pressure points. 18 is one half of 36 suggesting that perhaps an alternative set of attacks and defenses of preferred techniques and strategies from the original Sanseru 36. Sepai is found in Monk Boxing.



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Kururunfa - "Holding Ground"



Kururunfa epitomizes the ideals of Go-"hard and Ju-"soft". Stance transitions are quick and explosive while the hands techniques are employed using "muchimi" or a heavy, sticky movement. As in the other kata of Goju-Ryu, it is quite evident that grappling and close-quartered fighting is the favored fighting style. The same kanji "fa" is found in Saifa. Again, this would suggest a strong emphasis on grappling. Where most other styles' Kata concentrate on "block/punch", it is obvious from the unique techniques that this is not the case with Goju-Ryu.

Sesan - "13 Hands"



Sesan, Sanseru and Sepai all share the kanji "se". This may well be a Chinese dialect of the Okinawan term "te" or "fighting hand", referring to life-protection techniques. To better understand these Kata requires a more defined understanding of the language and culture of the people from which these Kata originated.

Sesan is believed to be the oldest of all Okinawan Goju-Ryu Kata. There is a version of Sesan practiced in the Shorin schools, but in comparison, the Goju-Ryu version is longer and much more complex.

Sesan is practiced in the following styles of Chinese Boxing: Dragon, Lion and Monk Fist

Suparinpei - "108 Hands"



Suparinpei is the most advanced Kata in Goju-Ryu. It contains the greatest number of techniques and variations. Suparinpei is deceptive in that it appears simple in execution but when combined with transitions and changing tempos, it is only surpassed by Sanchin in technical difficulty and understanding.

Once again, the number "108" is suggested to have origins in Buddhism and can represent the "108 sins of man". On the Chinese New Year, temple bells are rung 108 times to "drive away the evils of man".

It is believed these named associations with Buddhism is based upon the lack of factual knowledge of the true nature of these quan.

Secondly, with the cultural changes that took place in China during and after the Boxer Rebellion (1900) and the fall of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), little emphasis was placed on learning such complex arts. Most who learned the fighting arts after this time, did so as a means of exercise, recreation or artistic

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performance. In addition, the wide-spread use of firearms reduced the need and effectiveness for hand-to-hand combat to civil defense.

Suparinpei is found in the following styles of Chinese Boxing: Dragon, Tiger and Monk Fist.

Tensho - "Turning Palms"

The second "heishu" kata in Goju-Ryu, Tensho is derived from the Chinese form "Rokkishu". Unlike Sanchin, which is almost identical to its Chinese counterpart, Tensho is uniquely Okinawan. From his understanding of the Kata of Goju-Ryu and the "nature of man", Miyagi Sensei developed Tensho to further complete his Goju-Ryu where Sanchin left off. Tensho has many of the same principles of Sanchin but goes further to include more intricate concepts of the techniques of Goju-Ryu. These concepts expressly come alive in *kakie*, which in advanced training, breathes life into the bunkai of the Kata of Goju-Ryu.



The most notable difference between Sanchin and that of Tensho is that the breathing is explicitly different than that of Sanchin. The breathing of Tensho is not "hard" and external like Sanchin. The breath is internalized distinctively different and to the uneducated will appear to be the same as Sanchin.

The term "heishu" translates as "closed". As with every aspect of Okinawan Karate, there is more than one definition. First, "heishu" can refer to muscle contraction and "ibuki" style breathing unique to Sanchin and Tensho. Secondly, it can imply the restriction and specific direction of energies within the energy pathways of the body, both superficial and deep. The other 10 Kata are referred to as "kaishu" or "open", as they are free of constant muscle contraction and breathing is "normal".