

# Kyokushin Kata

## 極真型

The word *kata* means "shape" or "form". The *kanji* for kata (the Japanese character above at the right) is composed of the following characters:

形 *Katachi* meaning "Shape",

刈 *Kai* meaning "Cut", and

土 *Tsuchi* meaning "Earth" or "Soil".



Literally translated, *kata* means "shape which cuts the ground".

A kata is a sequence of blocks, kicks and punches from one or more stances, involving movement forward, backward and to the sides. The number of movements and their sequence are very specific. The balance between offensive and defensive techniques, the stances used and the direction and flow of movement all serve to give each kata its distinctive character.

Through the practice of kata, the traditional techniques used for fighting are learned. Balance, coordination, breathing and concentration are also developed. Done properly, kata are an excellent physical exercise and a very effective form of total mind and body conditioning. Kata embodies the idea of *ren ma*, or "always polishing" – with diligent practice, the moves of the kata become further refined and perfected. The attention to detail that is necessary to perfect a kata cultivates self discipline.

Through concentration, dedication and practice, a higher level of learning may be achieved, where the kata is so ingrained in the subconscious mind that no conscious attention is needed. This is what the Zen masters call *mushin*, or "no mind." The conscious, rational thought practice is not used at all – what was once memorized is now spontaneous.

The practice of traditional kata is also a way for the *karateka* to pay respect to the origins and history of Kyokushin Karate and the martial arts in general.

## Origins

Kyokushin kata are often categorized as "Northern Kata" or "Southern Kata," based upon their origin and development.

**The Northern Kata** are similar to those found in Shotokan Karate, since they were developed from Mas Oyama's training under Gichin Funakoshi. Master Funakoshi in turn derived these kata from northern Chinese kempo and Shorin Ryu, the Okinawan karate style based on Chinese Shaolin (i.e. "Shorin") kempo. These kata utilize long, powerful stances and strong blocks and strikes. The Northern Kata include:

- Taikyoku Sono Ichi, Ni and San
- Pinan Sono Ichi, Ni, San, Yon and Go
- Yansu
- Tsuki no Kata
- Kanku
- Sushiho

**The Southern Kata** were developed from Mas Oyama's study of the Okinawan karate style of Goju Ryu under So Nei Chu, which in turn were derived from southern Chinese kempo. The movements in these kata are more circular and flamboyant than those in the Northern Kata. The Southern Kata include:

- Sanchin no Kata
- Gekisai Dai and Sho
- Tensho
- Saiha
- Seienchin
- Gayru
- Seipai

## Meanings

**Taikyoku** is literally translated as "grand ultimate", and in Chinese, the *kanji* characters are pronounced *Tai Chi*. The word *Taikyoku* can also mean overview or the whole point – seeing the whole rather than focusing on the individual parts, and keeping an open mind or beginner's mind. The beginner's mind is what is strived for during training and in life. The beginner's mind does not hold prejudice and does not cling to a narrow view. The beginner's mind is open to endless possibilities.

**Pinan** is the Okinawan pronunciation of the *kanji* characters for peace and relaxation (pronounced *Heian* in Japanese). Though the physical moves of kata involve techniques used for fighting, the purpose of kata is to develop a calm, peaceful mind and harmony between the mind and body.

**Sanchin** literally means "three battles" or "three conflicts". It is the principal kata in certain Okinawan karate styles, such as Goju Ryu and Uechi Ryu, and it is likely one of the oldest kata. Certain legends attribute the creation of Sanchin to Bodhidharma in the early sixth century. Sanchin kata seeks to develop three elements at the same time:

- The mind, body and the techniques,
- The internal organs, circulation and the nervous system, and
- The three *ki*, located in:
  - the top of the head (*tento*),
  - the diaphragm (*hara*), and
  - the lower abdomen (*tan den*).

Sanchin is an isometric kata where each move is performed in a state of complete tension, accompanied by powerful, deep breathing (*ibuki*) that originates in the lower abdomen (*tan den*). The practice of Sanchin not only leads to the strengthening of the body, but to the development of the inner power (*ki*) and the coordination of mind and body.

**Gekisai** means conquer and occupy. The name is derived from the characters *Geki*, meaning attack or conquer, and *Sai*, meaning fortress or stronghold (literally translated as "closed", "shut" or "covered"). The word *Gekisai* can also mean demolish, destroy or pulverize. The katas teach strength through fluidity of motion, mobility and the utilization of various techniques. Flexibility of attack and response will always be superior to rigid and inflexible strength.

**Yansu** is derived from the characters *Yan*, meaning safe, and *Su*, meaning three. The name is attributed to that of a Chinese military attaché to Okinawa in the 19th Century. The word *yansu* also means to keep pure, striving to maintain the purity of principles and ideals rather than compromising for expediency.

**Tsuki no** by its very name is a punching kata (there is only one kick and just a few blocks in the entire kata). The word *Tsuki* can also mean fortune and luck. Good fortune and luck does not come by waiting. For every punch in this kata, envision that a personal barrier is being broken down. Strong, persistent effort directed at problems will bring good fortune.

**Tensho** means rolling or fluid hand, literally translated as "rotating palms". Tensho is the soft and circular (yin) counterpart to the hard and linear (yang) Sanchin kata. Not only was Tensho one of Mas Oyama's favorite kata, he considered it to be the most indispensable of the advanced kata:

Tensho is a basic illustration of the definition of Karate, derived from Chinese kempo, as a technique of circles based on points.

Tensho should be a prime object of practice because, as a psychological and theoretical support behind karate training and as a central element in basic karate formal exercises, it has permeated the techniques, the blocks and the thrusts, and is intimately connected with the very life of karate.

A man who has practiced Tensho kata a number of thousands of times and has a firm grasp of its theory can not only take any attack, but can also turn the advantage in any attack, and will always be able to defend himself perfectly.

**Saiha** means extreme destruction, smashing or tearing. The word *Saiha* can also mean great wave, the source of the IFK logo. No matter how large a problem is encountered, with patience, determination and perseverance (*Osu*) one can rise above and overcome it, or smash through and get beyond it.

**Kanku** means sky gazing. Literally translated, *Kan* means "view", and *Ku* means "universe", "air", "emptiness" or "void" (the same character as *Kara* in karate). The first move of the kata is the formation of an opening with the hands above the head, through which one gazes at the universe and rising sun. The significance is that no matter what problems are faced, each day is new and the universe is waiting. Nothing is so terrible that it affects the basic reality of existence.

**Seienchin** means conqueror and subdue over a distance, or attack the rebellious outpost. In feudal Japan, Samurai warriors would often go on expeditions lasting many months, and they needed to maintain their strength and spirit over a long period of time. This kata is long and slow, with many techniques performed from *kiba dachi* (horseback stance). The legs usually become very tired in this kata, and a strong spirit is needed to persevere, instead of giving up. The word *Seienchin* can also mean to pull in battle.

**Sushiho** means 54 steps. *Sushiho* is derived from the words *Usheshi*, the Okinawan pronunciation of the *kanji* characters for 54 (pronounced *Go Ju Shi* in Japanese), and *Ho*, meaning walk or step. Other karate styles call this advanced kata Gojushiho.

**Garyu** means reclining dragon. In Japanese philosophy, a great man who remains in obscurity is called a Garyu. A dragon is all-powerful, but a reclining dragon chooses not to display his power until it is needed. Likewise, a true *karateka* does not brag about or show off his abilities. He never forgets the true virtue of humility.

**Seipai** is the Okinawan pronunciation of the *kanji* characters for 18 (pronounced *Ju Hachi* in Japanese). In other karate styles, this kata is sometimes called Seipaite, or eighteen hands. The number 18 is derived from the Buddhist concept of 6 x 3, where six represents color, voice, taste, smell, touch and justice and three represents good, bad and peace.