

# Elements of Advanced Technique Studied through Sanchin Kata

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Every student of Karate is endowed with a level of strength, speed, flexibility, and endurance that with time and practice naturally develop. Unfortunately, these superficial qualities often mark the primary difference between the beginner and the advanced black belt. This article focuses on elements of a deeper subject: the lifelong development of *technique*. To illustrate the process of development, the article probes deeply into the first four steps of *sanchin*, the most fundamental kata of Okinawan Goju-Ryu.

The version of sanchin described here was developed by the styles founder, Miyagi, Chojun Sensei, and serves primarily as a catalog of basic principles. It evolved by adding hard (*go*) closed hand, strength building movements to soft (*ju*), open-handed techniques imported from China. Miyagi Sensei taught sanchin as the first kata and considered it so important that he required students to train exclusively on it for many years. When performed correctly, sanchin harmonizes both the soft and hard components of structure, movement, and breathing. The goal of this paper is to systematically reveal these principles by explaining the kata at successively deeper levels of understanding. At the beginner level, the soft principles of sanchin are introduced and developed. At the intermediate level, hard principles are added. Finally, the advanced student develops the combination of soft and hard principles to achieve a desired training outcome and improve overall technique. The ideas are so fundamental that they are applicable to any karate style and every student can benefit from the study of sanchin.

## Principals of Structure and Movement

The beginning student focuses attention on the principles of structure and movement in sanchin. This involves memorization of the basic pattern, correct positioning and movement of the body, and the harmony of breathing with motion. The kata should be performed repeatedly each day in front of a mirror, and always with the gi top removed to allow careful inspection of the body's position and form. The beginner uses slow, graceful, tension-free movements and follows each move by checking the body position and adjusting the stance to the correct form.

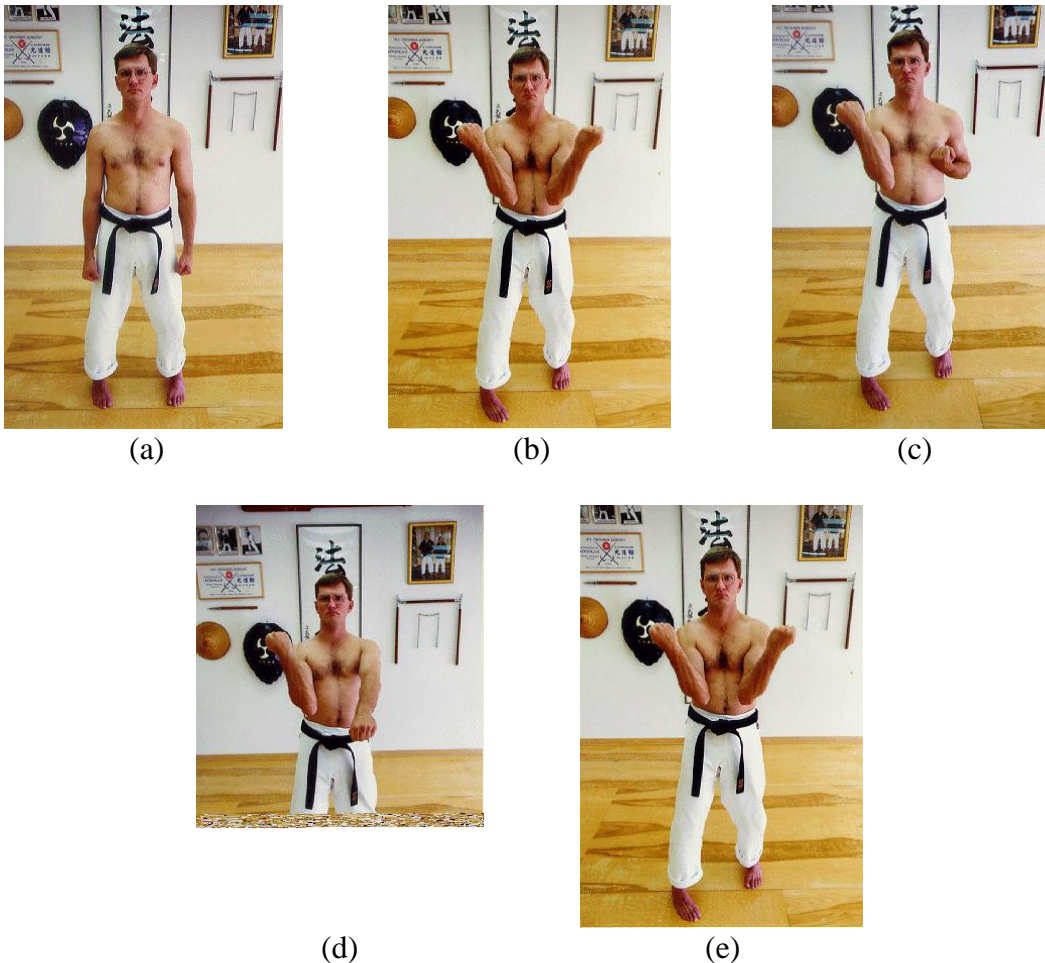
**Principal #1:** *Practice slowly and carefully, checking and correcting stance with each movement.*

The mind should be focused using a common procedure at every stance: it begins by placing attention at the feet and works steadily up the body until reaching the *tan tien*, a

spot located just below the navel that forms the center of energy flow in the body. Focus is then moved to the *crown point* at the top of the head and continues down the body ending again at the *tan tien*. This procedure ensures that each muscle group is considered methodically as part of a consistent procedure of improvement.

**Principal #2:** *Focus the mind on each muscle group in a fixed pattern.*

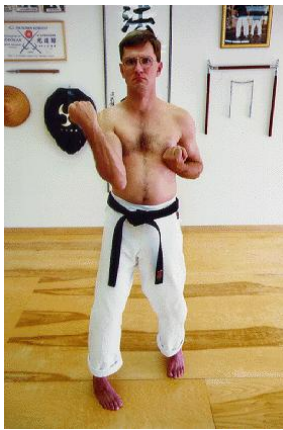
Sanchin uses a simple pattern that combines several basic blocks and punches. Figure 1 shows the first few steps taken from the ready-stance, *heiko dachi* (a). The first transition is to a right sanchin stance, *migi sanchin dachi*, and is followed by the first block, a double-handed side block, *morote chudan yoko uke* (b). Following the block, the left hand is chambered (c), a left two-knuckle punch, *hidari seiken zuki* is executed (d), then a left side block (e).



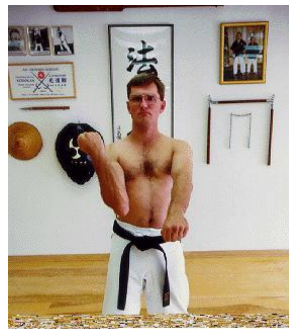
**Figure 1: Opening steps**

These movements are followed by a step into left sanchin stance, the right hand is chambered, and a right two knuckle punch with corresponding side block are executed.

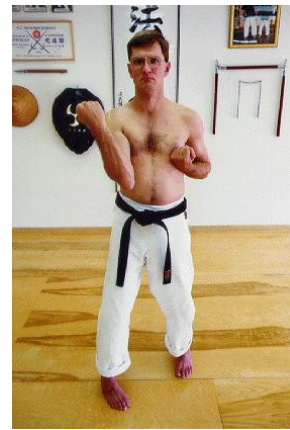
The initial sequence ends, as shown in Figure 2, with a step into right sanchin stance, executing a corresponding left chamber (f) and punch (g). The left hand is then re-chambered (h) and brought across the body while the student looks to an adversary on the left (i). The right foot then transitions in a cross-legged stance (j), a 180-degree turn is executed (k), and the student ends in a left sanchin stance with the right hand chambered. This sequence sets the student up to repeat the basic pattern of three steps and punches in the opposite direction.



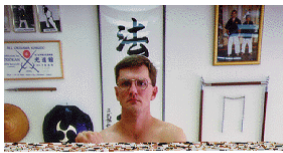
(f)



(g)



(h)



(i)



(j)



(k)

**Figure 2: Completing the initial sequence**

**Structure.** Applying principal #2, let us now re-examine the central aspects of the opening sequence from the viewpoint of structure. To do this, consider the ready stance

shown in Figure 1(a) and begin at the feet: The feet form our link to the universe, our goal is to firmly root the body to the floor and lower the body's center of gravity to provide stability. To achieve this, the position of the feet is critical, Figure 3(a) shows the correct positioning with the outer edges of the feet parallel, a shoulder width apart.



(a)



(b)

**Figure 3: Ready Stance Feet Positioning**

A common error is to position the feet in the more natural stance shown in Figure 3(b). Unfortunately, a stable stance cannot be obtained from this position. The same concept applies to the sanchin stance shown throughout the opening sequence. Like the ready stance, careful positioning of the feet is essential to stability. Figure 4(a) shows the correct positioning for a right sanchin stance. The toe of the left foot and heel of the right foot are aligned a shoulder width apart. The left foot is aligned with the outer edge forward and the right foot is turned slightly inward. A common error is to position the feet as shown in Figure 4(b); again, a stable stance cannot be obtained in this position.



(a)



(b)

**Figure 4: Sanchin Stance Feet Positioning**

**Principal #3:** *Correctly position the feet so as to grip the floor.*

Working up the body, the hips should be carefully aligned facing forward with the back held straight above the base of the spine.

Moving to the top of the body, the crown of the head is pushed upward as if to suck energy from the universe while straightening the neck and spine. The eyes should look forward and slightly upward as if looking to the future. When performing in front of a mirror, the gaze should be turned over the right shoulder of the reflection so as to allow the entire body to be perceived at once using *peripheral vision*. The tongue is placed on the hard palette allowing the free flow of air to and from the body. The chin is tucked slightly inward to improve breathing and prevent strangle holds. The shoulders are always aligned forward and held down.

**Principal #4:** *Use peripheral vision to take in the entire scene.*

Notice the position of the arms and shoulders in the double side block, Figure 1(b). The elbow is placed a fist distance from the body and the arm forms a 90-degree angle at the elbow. The arms form a v-shape in front of the body with the shoulders firmly down.

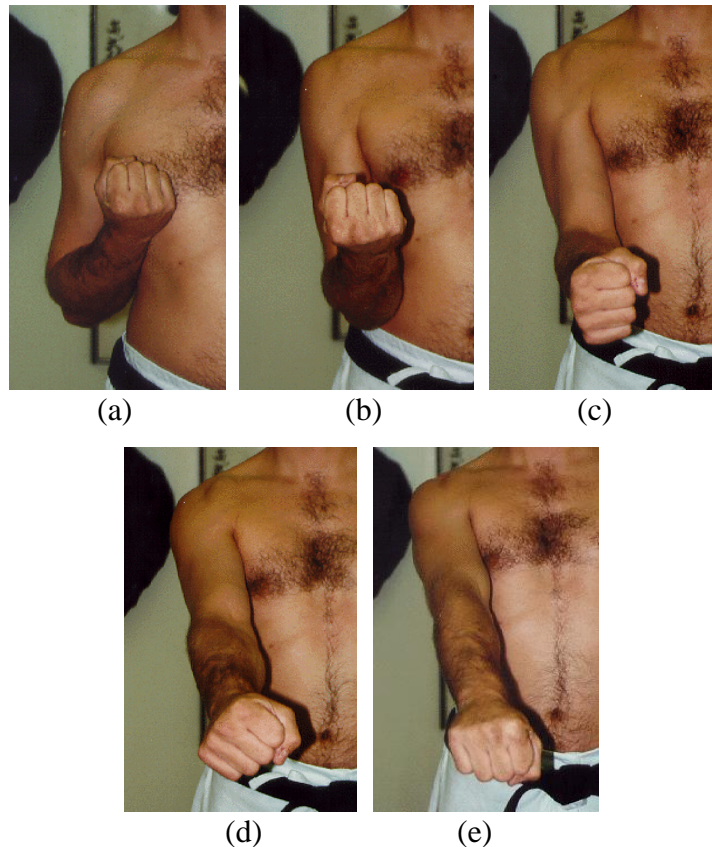
**Principal #5:** *Correctly position the arms to ensure an effective blocking technique that will deflect rather than forcibly stop a blow.*

**Movement.** There are four primary transitions in our opening sequence: stance-to-stance, chamber-to-punch, punch-to-block, and stance-to-turn. The goal of the beginning student is to remain fluid, stable and upright at all times with the shoulders held down and the hips and shoulders aligned forward. During motion the body does not teeter-totter by swaying from side to side, nor bob up and down. To achieve this fluidity, the body is held loose with the knees slightly bent.

The *stance-to-stance* transition occurs between the ready stance and sanchin stance, Figure 1(a) to 1(b), or between consecutive sanchin stances. This transition is achieved by moving the body's weight to the forward foot while bending the forward knee slightly so as to keep the shoulders at the same level. The rear foot is then brought forward in a circular motion that extends to the centerline between the feet. The foot that moves maintains contact with the floor on its outer edge throughout the motion. At the end of the transition, the feet are checked to ensure that they are positioned correctly. If an error is found, the foot that moved is the one that made the mistake, corrections are therefore always applied to the foot that moved.

**Principal #6:** *Move gracefully with circular motions paying special attention to keep the body from bobbing either up and down or from side to side.*

Figure 5 breaks down the *chamber-to-punch* transition shown in Figure 1(c) and (d) into five segments. The transition begins from the chambered position in which the elbow points down and the hand is clenched with the thumb tucked to prevent an inadvertent break (a). The punch first extends to an uppercut position (b), then transitions to a vertical punch when the elbow is approximately a fist distance from the body (c). When the punch is fully extended it rests in a natural position slightly inward from the vertical position (d). This position is best determined though a simple arm swinging exercise: swing the arms loosely at the side of the body extending up to shoulder height; after swinging freely four or five time, halt the swing at shoulder height and the hands will naturally hold the correct striking position. The chamber-to-punch transition ends with a cutting motion of the hand when the arm is fully extended. This final movement occurs after the blow is struck and causes the knuckles to grind into an opponent with a twisting motion. The transition ends with the arm locked into its final position (e).



**Figure 5: Chamber-to-Punch Transition**

The punch extends forward from the shoulder, like a battering ram, and does not cross the body. In this manner, the punch is delivered with the full weight of the body behind it. When striking an opponent, the practitioner aligns the body to strengthen the punch rather than weaken the punch to compensate for poor positioning. Throughout this sequence the shoulders remain firmly down, the upper arm pinches the pectoral muscles, and the elbow transitions by *scraping the rib cage*. Two common errors are to raise the shoulders and to

allow the elbow to drift outward from the body. Both weaken the technique. It is most important to practice the punch development very slowly until it becomes second nature.

**Principal #7:** *All punches develop from a common transition in which the arm extends forward from the shoulder like a battering ram.*

The *punch-to-block* transition follows a circular path rather like opening a door: the hand rotates upward while the elbow moves in slightly causing the upper arm to push against the pectoral muscles. Throughout the transition, the shoulders remain down and the final body position should again be with the forearms in a v-shape with the elbows a fist distance from the body.

The final transition, *stance-to-turn*, is shown in Figures 2(j) and (k) and requires that the body remain upright at all times. As the right leg crosses the left, the knees should touch. The turn is performed on the balls of the feet in a manner that ends in sanchin stance. As the body twists out of the turn, the left arm first forms a guard and then moves into the standard side block position, while the right arm is simultaneously chambered in readiness for a subsequent punch.

**Principal #8:** *During all movements, the shoulders are held down, the upper arm pinches the pectoral muscles, and the elbows scrape the rib cage.*

**Breathing.** The beginning student uses a natural breathing technique (*Jeng Fuh Hu Shi*) taken from Nei Dan Chi Kung. Unlike normal breathing that involves movement of the chest, natural breathing uses a slow, deep, abdominal breath centered on the tan tien. The abdomen is consciously forced to expand as air is inhaled through the nose. The abdomen is allowed to contract as air is exhaled through the mouth. The breath is never held, but instead forms a continuous, smooth, and natural motion. This form of breathing is used to heal the body and develop physical strength. It has the effect of exercising and developing the abdominal muscles, massaging the internal organs especially the kidneys, and increasing circulation. This process calms the mind, strengthens the will and leads to a general improvement in health that allows the student to progress to develop other aspects of their technique.

In the sanchin kata, a particularly crucial concept is to synchronize breathing with movement. This synchronization manages oxygen to ensure that techniques are always delivered with the full force of mind and body. Consider the initial few movements of the kata from the ready stance in Figure 1. A long breath accompanies the first motion, to the double side block. The inhalation occurs while the hands rise; the student exhales as the arms fall into position in the double side block. This sets up the breathing pattern for subsequent moves that are generally prepared with inhalation and delivered with exhalation. The subsequent punch is delivered with a long deep breath. While chambering

the left hand for the punch, as shown in Figure 1(c), inhalation begins at the point where movement to the chamber is initiated and stops at the precise moment that the hand is in its final resting position in the chamber. Exhalation begins when the punch is initiated; the breath is fully expelled precisely at the point where the punch ends as shown in Figure 1(d). The subsequent side block, shown in Figure 1(e), involves a short breath. As the arm rotates upward, the inhalation occurs; breath is exhaled as the arm falls into position in the standard double block.

One further example of this synchronization occurs in the final stance-to-turn transition shown in Figure 2. Here the breath is inhaled while the left hand is chambered in Figure 2(h), exhaled while it traverses the body in Figure 2(i), and inhaled for the full duration of the turn in Figure 2(j) and 1(k). This sequence ensures that oxygen is available for a subsequent punch with the chambered right hand.

**Principal #9:** *Synchronize natural breathing with motion, inhale while preparing and exhale while delivering each blow.*

### **Intermediate Go Principles**

After learning the basic pattern combining structure with movement and breathing, the intermediate student progresses to strength training. This has often been termed *iron-shirt training* as it gradually develops a hard surface of solid muscle that provides protection against even the strongest blows. The essence of the idea is to gradually reinforce the basic structures introduced earlier by adding successive levels of muscle tension, thereby building strength and endurance. A central component of this training is to *lock down* each muscle group into a strong reinforced position with each movement.

At the intermediate level, sanchin is performed slowly and carefully with all muscle groups in tension and constant attention to form. A common error is for the student to exaggerate the required tension with severe and uncontrollable exertion. Over-exertion can lead to high-blood pressure and can cause a heart attack or stroke. Further, a muscle under severe exertion tires the student and results in jerky motions. In contrast, a tight solid muscle can provide protection and yet be moved with fluidity. Muscle tension is built gradually, over a period of years, through repetition.

**Structure.** Returning to the right sanchin stance shown in Figure 1(b), the mind is focussed to induce tension by considering each muscle group in turn as focus moves up the body. With the feet in the position shown in Figure 3(a), the toes grip the floor while the heels turn inward rooting the stance in the floor and gripping it tightly. Focus then moves to the calves and backs of the legs which should be tightened by the twisting

motion at the heels. Then focus turns to the thighs, with the knees bent slightly, the anus is tucked inward and the tan tien is moved upward slightly. This causes the thighs to tighten in an outward twisting motion that protects the groin yet places the entire lower body in tension. A common error is for the student to lean backward when performing this technique, the back must be kept straight with the hips aligned forward for stability. A graphic illustration of poor technique can be obtained by attempting this procedure with the feet in the position shown in Figure 3(b): the feet are unable to gain a firm grip in this position and as a result little tightening of the body is possible.

Moving to the top of the body, the crown of the head is pushed upward, the neck becomes tense, and the shoulders, which should be down, also become tense. In the double block position, the top of the arm pinches the pectoral muscles causing the entire muscle group at the shoulder to be locked down and into position as shown in Figure 6. Next the hands are clenched firmly, the elbow is moved inward slightly and the small finger on each hand is rotated toward the body. This motion exerts tension on every muscle group in both the upper and lower arm. Finally, moving down the body further the muscles in the abdomen at the tan tien are tightened.



**Figure 6:** Upper Arm Pinching the Pectoral Muscles.

To perfect locking of the muscles in the upper body, training is augmented with chishi weights as shown in Figure 7. If these weights are not available, students can obtain a heavy hammer from a local hardware store, and simply cut down the handle to obtain a training device with the same characteristics. Training is initiated with the chishi simply sitting on the floor in front of the student (a). The student then wraps a hand around the handle and lifts the weight vertically by bending the knees and keeping the arm straight (b). This first movement places the shoulder muscle group in the correct locked position: it should feel as if the entire shoulder from the neck, across the pectoral muscles, and into the upper arm is one complete and integrated whole. Next the chishi is brought upward to the position (c). This position corresponds to a vertical punch. The student should again feel the upper arm pinching against the pectoral muscles and again the entire shoulder group should lock down into an integrated whole. From the vertical punch, the chishi is

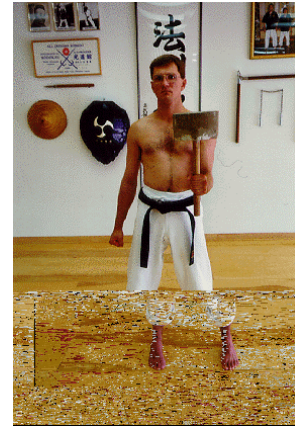
then brought to the side block position (d). This position again locks the shoulder group, but also causes the elbow to be rotated across the body and the small finger of the hand to be rotated inward causing the entire set of arm muscles to become tense and unified. To end the exercise, the chishi weight is brought backward, then over the shoulder and back to the vertical punch position (e). During this motion, the student attempts to maintain the shoulder group in a locked position. This motion is repeated on each side and eventually with two weights simultaneously. A variety of other similar exercises can be used to enhance this form of training.



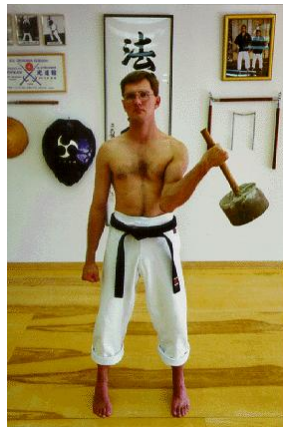
(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)

**Figure 7: Chishi Training**

Chishi training can be based on repetitions to strengthen the shoulder muscle group in every position used and improve endurance. Alternatively, training can be conducted slowly with each position held so as to develop endurance, flexibility and form. Slow

training is also used to develop *feeling*: The student holds each position, closes the eyes, and focuses the mind on allowing the chishi weight to take the muscle group into a natural position. The weight works to assemble the muscle group in the correct position and allows the student to develop an instinctive feel for the correct position. When performing the kata, this instinctive feeling will guide the positioning of the body and lead to improved technique without conscious thought.

Progress in chishi training is immediately noticeable from the manner in which the student picks up the chishi as shown in Figure 7 (a) and (b). Early on, the student picks up the chishi with the arm muscles and tires the arm quickly. Soon this movement progresses to where the weight is lifted with the entire shoulder group locked into position. Eventually, the student lifts the weight with the entire body: the body is rooted in the floor providing a stable position, the center of weight is lowered, the anus is tucked, and all of the other sanchin principles are applied.

**Movement.** The muscle locking techniques developed using chishi weights are integrated directly into the performance of the sanchin kata. Throughout each movement, the student pays careful attention to the position of the body to ensure that all muscle groups are locking into the appropriate position. Every movement of the arms, be they punch, block, or chamber, should occur with the shoulders down and the entire upper body configured as a single muscle mass.

**Principal #10:** *Lock each muscle group into a single integrated whole that is maintained throughout the kata.*

The student focuses attention on the shoulder group during each punch. As the punch extends the elbow scrapes the rib cage. The pectoral muscles and upper arm grip tightly together causing a pinching of the muscles just below the armpit. The punch extends like a battering ram with every arm muscle locked into position supporting the arm. The entire weight of the body strikes the punch, not simply the knuckles. To illustrate the point, the student can try extending a punch with the focus of attention at the knuckles. The effect is to loosen the entire arm and shoulder muscle group, this results in a punch that has little force and cohesiveness.

With the body under tension, any movement of the feet inevitably causes a momentary loss of the body's rooting in the floor. As a result, the foot movements between techniques are deliberately quicker and somewhat jerkier than the slow deliberate movements of the arms. The intent is to minimize the loss of tension in a transition.

**Breathing.** At the intermediate level the students begins to learn an alternative abdominal breathing technique, termed martial breathing (*Faan Fuh Hu Shi*). Like natural breathing, this form of breathing strengthens and develops the abdominal muscles and provides substantially more oxygen to the body than everyday breathing. Two primary forms of this breathing technique are employed in the sanchin kata. The first is a long deep breath in which air is drawn in slowly and deeply through the nose. The breath is visualized as following a long path around the top of the head, down the neck and back, under the groin, and finally curls itself up at the tan tien in the lower abdomen. This long deep abdominal breath inward is accompanied by the abdomen *contracting*. When exhaling, air is pushed out as the abdomen expands. The air moves slowly and smoothly, rising up the front of the body to the neck and is finally expended through the mouth. The second form of breathing is a short breath in which air is transferred directly to the tan tien while the abdomen contracts. The breath is expended quickly and directly while the abdomen expands. Just as in the natural breathing, all breathing is synchronized with the motion of the body when performing the kata. Once again, breath is inhaled when preparing a technique and exhaled with delivering it.

The intermediate student develops the martial breathing pattern so as to store a reserve of oxygen and to lower the body's center of mass. The chest never moves during this form of breathing since all breath is concentrated in the tan tien. During exhalation, as breath is pushed out of the abdomen, the breath is cut short at about 75% with a "ha" sound that originates in the abdomen. This sound is synchronized with a conscious tightening of the abdominal muscles. These muscles tighten first outward and then downward as the students focus of attention is at the abdomen lowering the body's center of weight. At the same time, the associated technique is locked into position as described in previous sections. For example, at the precise moment that a punch strikes, the shoulder group should become locked, breath is 75% expelled, and the muscles in the abdomen are pushed down, the lower body is tightened, and the body becomes rooted into the floor. The technique thus drives into an opponent's body like a battering ram from a highly stable position with the entire body rigid just at the instant of impact.

During an attack the body is most vulnerable at the point between breaths since generally there is little oxygen to power movement. This form of martial breathing ensures that the body always carries a reserve of breath with which to respond. Moreover, no visual clue can be taken from the motion of the chest as to the breathing pattern, making it difficult for an opponent to time an attack between breaths. Finally, tightening of the abdominal muscles allows the body to accept a blow to the body with a reserve of oxygen to power a counter attack.

**Principal #11:** *Combine martial breathing and locking to obtain solid, highly stable, striking and defensive forms.*

The effect of conscious movement of weight into the tan tien can be demonstrated with a simple test. A second person attempts to lift the student, first without weight focused into

the tan tien and subsequently with the appropriate focus. In the former case it is relatively easy to lift the student from the ground, in the latter it is impossible. The conscious lowering of the center of weight coupled with the rooting of the body in the ground by applying tension in the lower body, leads to unparalleled stability. It is generally not possible to dislodge the practitioner from sanchin stance with even violent thrusts.

## Advanced Goju Techniques

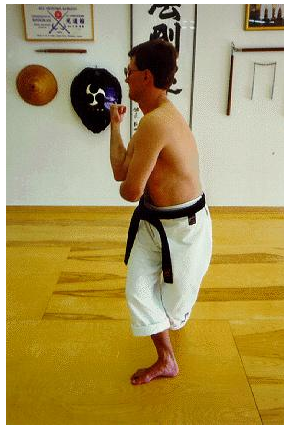
The advanced practitioner builds upon the basic concepts described previously by combining both the hard and soft principles to stress a particular component of technique during a single training session. A number of refinements to the basic concepts are important to develop.

**Building and Controlling Energy.** Over the centuries the Chinese have developed a theory of how the human body interacts with the universe and how energy (*chi*) is developed, stored, and expended in the human body. The theory is based on the opposing (*yin*) and complementary (*yang*) forces in nature and attempts to develop an understanding of the human body from this viewpoint. Central to this study is a system of *meridians* and *vital energy points* that represent paths of energy flow between major points and organs in the body. For example, one of the primary energy points is the tan tien, translated as the “field of elixir” reflecting the vital role that oxygen and breathing play in physical well being. The study of energy flow has been a recurrent theme in Taoist philosophy and underlies traditional Chinese medicine and healing practice such as acupuncture. To master and improve the flow of energy in the body, physical and spiritual disciplines have evolved, such as yoga and chi kung, that develop the interaction of movement, breathing, and mental concentration. These healing concepts are the foundation upon which the martial arts are built. Many exercises in karate work and develop specific meridians. Therefore it should not be surprising that advanced karate attempts to focus the flow and transfer of energy into martial techniques.

To illustrate how energy is built and controlled reconsider the initial sequence of movements in sanchin. After the initial double block shown in Figure 1(b), the first punch, shown in Figure 1(d), is expended under *increased tension* brought about by mental focus. When the next block follows, in Figure 1(e), tension is again *increased*. This action effectively locks stored energy into the right of the body. As the left punch and block are subsequently developed, mental concentration is again focussed on increasing the tension in the body and this time locking down both shoulder muscle groups. Both sides of the body are now under heightened tension, storing energy. The final punch and block combination, on the right side of the body, re-enforces and

increases this tension still further. Thus just prior to the turn the body should feel like a pressure cooker storing and holding energy.

As the feet position for the turn, a subtle modification is now made to the hip position as illustrated in Figure 8. Instead of begin held in an aligned position, the hips are twisted in the *opposite direction to the turn*. This acts to maintain the stored energy in the body and should feel as if the body is being curled up like a spring. When the turn is finally executed it now occurs at very high speed, as if the spring were suddenly released, causing all the stored energy of previous movements to be thrown sharply into the block that follows the turn. Imagine receiving this block on any part of the anatomy, it would constitute a blow of devastating impact.



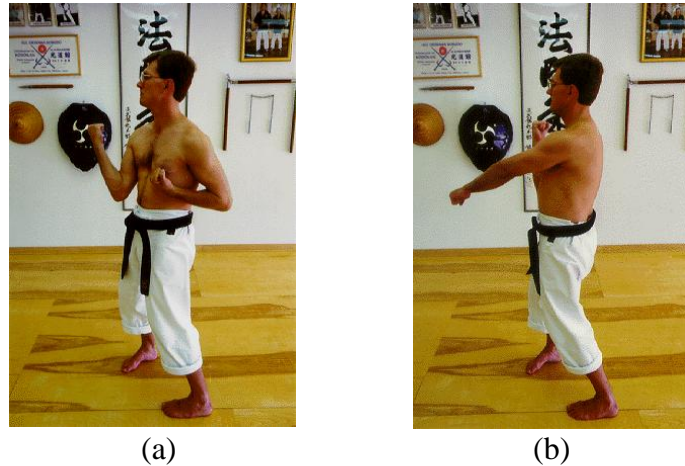
**Figure 8: The coiled spring**

Miyagi Sensei believed that a conflict should be ended with the first block. Clearly, a block is not simply a defensive technique, it can be highly effective in immobilizing an opponent when coupled with sufficient energy.

**Principal #12:** *Carefully build and control the expenditure of energy.*

**Fah jing.** As a student develops the ability to build and control internal energy, techniques must then be developed to transfer power (*fah jing*) into karate techniques. To illustrate this idea, consider how power can be transferred into the punching technique. During the previous explanations emphasis has been on maintaining the hips aligned forward during the performance of the sanchin kata. Careful consideration of this position will develop an instinct for the final locked position of each movement. However, the power of a punch is delivered not from the motion of the arm, but by placing the entire body weight behind the punch. This motion originates in a subtle movement of the hips that is illustrated through exaggeration in Figure 9. This figure breaks down the motion of the punch and highlights the associated hip movement. Throughout the delivery of a punch the *hips lead the motion* of the body as shown in Figures 9(a) and (b). Just at the

point of contact, the entire body *reverberates* back into the locked position practiced previously with the hips aligned. In this position the muscles in the shoulder are locked down, the arm is aligned with the body in the battering ram position, the body is firmly rooted into the ground, 75% of the body's air has been expelled, and the muscles in the abdomen are tensed.



**Figure 9: Hip movement during punching.**

This hip motion cannot be achieved without careful practice. Three exercises are useful in developing fah jing. The first involves the free motion of the hips: The student stands upright in the ready stance, the arms are held loosely by the sides, and the hips are swung freely from left to right by turning the body. The shoulders are held parallel to the floor and the swing is exaggerated as far to the left and right as possible to ensure the free motion of the body. In the second exercise, the body is rotated in a similar fashion as the first exercise, however, here the movement is *driven from the hips* in a shaking motion. The shaking of the body is driven from the hip motion rather than carried by the twisting of the body. The hip motion should be allowed to naturally die down after two or three shakes from left to right. Thus the initial thrust of the hips eventually *reverberates* back to an aligned position naturally. A good posture must be maintained throughout these exercises. In the final exercise, the hip is thrust forward, the body shakes, and eventually comes to a final *locked position* in which the body is tense and rooted in the ground as described previously at the end of the punch.

Over a period of time the hip motion becomes second nature and is gradually integrated into the overall punching technique. As practice proceeds, the hip motion should become less and less pronounced. Eventually it blends into a fluid body motion associated with every punch or block. At this time, fah jing becomes an *internal* component of the motion of the tan tien rather than an observable external movement.

**Principal #13:** *Strike not with the hand, but with the entire body through fah jing.*

**Loading and Reloading.** Each technique in the opening sequence has so far been explained somewhat independently. However, the kata can be used to leverage the yin and yang concept of force and counter-force by loading and reloading the body's energy for subsequent movements. This chi control allows every cover and chamber to reload the energy in the body for a subsequent block or strike respectively through a subtle positioning of the body. For example, following a right punch and block the body is locked down into position with the hips aligned. As the left arm is brought to the chamber position, the hips move back slightly loading the body with energy for the subsequent punch. This principle can also be applied to every block. Generally, each block has an associated cover. Hip movement during the cover has the impact of loading energy into the block. The block is executed with fah jing causing the stored energy to be transferred directly into the block increasing the force of the technique.

**Principal #14:** *Load and reload the body's energy to cascade a sequence of techniques.*

## **Concluding Remarks.**

Sanchin is not a fighting kata but rather a catalog of principles that develops general technique. These principles permeate all aspects of karate and are the basis for all other kata. For example, every kata involves a variety of stances that include the ready stance, forward stance, etc. In every stance, we can apply the basic principles from sanchin: The feet are positioned so as to grip the floor. Circular movements are used in each transition to protect vital parts of the body. The feet remain in contact with the floor at all times preventing sweeps and throws. Each movement is conducted with fluidity, however, at the split second of delivery, each block or punch takes the form of sanchin. The feet are rooted to the ground providing stability, each punch is delivered as a battering ram with the full force of the body behind it, and every muscle group is locked reinforcing, the blow. Each block is itself a blow that sets up the body for a subsequent technique by loading chi into the body for the counter strike. Breathing is coordinated with movements to conserve energy in the body and extend endurance. Clearly, sanchin is the source of all these concepts.

The heightened role of discipline in Asian culture allows students to actively pursue sanchin concepts without the need for reasoning. In stark contrast, students in the United States are conditioned by their heritage to strive for understanding through questioning.

The western mind is unable to focus on the *how* of an activity, unless there is first a clear understanding of the *why* that underlies it. This basic cultural difference is often misunderstood and presents a significant barrier to karate students in the United States. As a result, much of the advanced training that occurs only after the attainment of a black belt in Okinawa is lost on US practitioners. This article has sought to reveal some of the principles and reasons *why* students should pursue sanchin training with diligence: it will surely lead to superior technique and will carry over to every aspect of their martial arts training, irrespective of the style chosen to pursue.

## **Biography**

Sensei Marvin Labbate is a 7th Dan Kyoshi in Traditional Okinawan Goju-Ryu, 5th Dan Renshi in Matayoshi Kubodo, and a certified Tai Chi Chuan instructor. He has studied karate for over 35 years and is the United States representative for the Okinawan Seibukai Association under its president Nakasone Sensei. Sensei Labbate is the director of CNY Karate founded in 1963, the oldest karate school in Upstate New York. He teaches traditional Goju-Ryu Karatedo. His children's program incorporates comprehensive life skills training curricula. He also teaches special classes for children and adults that include the popular "stranger danger" program for children and self-defense classes for women. In his spare time, he conducts seminars on a broad variety of martial arts topics.

## **Acknowledgments**

This article has been profoundly influenced by two of the worlds leading authorities in martial arts: Mr. Kinei Nakasone, President of the Okinawan Goju-Ryu Seibukai Organization, and Mr. Erle Montaigne, Director of the World Tai Chi Boxing Association. I should like to offer my sincere thanks for the help, advice, and friendship of both these talented individuals.