

SHOTOKAN KATA NAME TRANSLATIONS

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Master Funakoshi renamed Shotokan kata from its original Okinawan name to a Japanese name indicative of the form. “Since karate is a Japanese martial art, there is no apparent reason for retaining these unfamiliar and in some cases unclear names of Chinese origin simply because of earlier usage”, Funakoshi [FUN73]. The names given were either a Japanese rendering of the form's original Okinawan name, or something to indicate the meaning of the form based on the Master's study.

The first thirteen were renamed at the time the term karate was change from 'Chinese Hands' to 'Empty Hands'. These names remain today. Later named Kata tended to revert back to their original Okinawan name¹.

The purpose of this draft is three fold:

- To give the English reading of the kata's Kanji. Hence the form's name.
- What does the name mean in relationship to the kata.
- A little history. In most cases, this would be by conjecture. Since kata of ancient origin were orally and in secret handed down, little can be known about them exactly.

The katas are listed under three sections. One section for each of the major schools of Okinawan karate, Tomari-te, Shuri-te, or Naha-te. These are the roots of the kata, where it was introduced, developed, or chiefly practice. Tomari, Shuri and Naha are principle cites in Okinawa where karate developed. '-te' (lt. hand), to express the martial art of the region. In time, Shuri-te and Tomari-te became what is known as the Shorin school, while Naha-te as the shorei school².

The katas are listed according its known Shotokan name, followed by its common Okinawan name in parentheses, with a western interpretation of the name following. The number of moves is obtained from the *Best Karate* series.

¹ A direct reading of the Kanji for these later named katas by Master Funakoshi had no specific meaning that could be determined by the author. Therefore, they are assumed to be proper names. When the names reverted back their original Okinawan name, meaning could be ascertained.

² However, how katas are classified as being in the Shorin style or the Shorei style does not follow the pattern. It is quite different. Jutte, Hangetsu, Jion, Tekki, and Sochin are classed as Shorei styled kata. All others are Shorin.

Tomari-te

Bassai Dai (Passai Dai) - To Penetrate a Fortress³ [42 Moves]

The kata begins with a set of powerful blocks, switching to equally powerful attacks. The shifting of a disadvantage to an advantage. With the force of will, the kata represents the qualities needed to breach a fortress.

Kata's roots are traceable to Kokan Oyadomari of Tomari. Practice in many variations. The dominant variants became known as the 'Tomari no Passai' and the 'Matsumura no Bassai'. Shotokan version has lineage thru the latter.

Okinawan name is sometimes written as Patsai or Patasai.

Empi (Wanshu) - Flying Swallow [37 Moves]

The up and down, quick and sharp movements of the kata mimics the swooping flight of a swallow. Master Funakoshi named the kata Em(flying) pi(swallow). Its ancient name was Wansu, after the Okinawan name of Wang Ji, a Chinese envoy who came to Okinawa in c.1683. Taught and modified by many since its inception. The version in Shotokan today was either adapted from Sokon "Bushi" Matsumura (c.1809-1901) or "Ankoh" Yasutsune Itsou (1832-1916). Probably the latter.

Jion (Jion Ji) - A proper name [47 Moves]

Kata retains its original name. Probably was conceived by a monk associated with the Buddhist 'Jion' temple of ancient China. Evidence of this can be seen in the 'Yoi'. Where the wrapping of the left hand around the right was how the monks of the temple greeted and identified each other [VAN87].

The literal meaning of the kanji is love(ji) and kindness(on). 'Join ji', the temple of love and kindness.

Ji'in (Ji'in) - Temple Ground [27 Moves]

The first kanji is 'ji' as an 'Jion'. The second is 'in', meaning shade from a tree, which offers protection. Together, the 'protective ground of the Jion temple' or simply, 'temple ground'.

³ *The Kanji used to write the Kata Bassai has no specific meaning. However, the word "bassai" does have meaning, which is "to take on the attack" or "to cut down". The translation, "to thrush Asunder" or "to beach a fortress" as sometimes written in western text, is written with different Kanji. The author has yet to resolve this anomaly.*

Originally called SHOKYO by Master Funakoshi. Basically unchanged from its Tomari-te roots. Handed down to Shotokan through Itosu.

Jutte (Jitte) - Ten Hands [24 Moves]

Ju(Ten) te(hands)⁴ implies, once mastered, one is able to successfully engage ten opponents. A kata of unknown origin usually performed with the Bo. The empty hand form is perhaps unique to Shotokan [HAS91]. In Shotokan, it is practiced as a defense against the Bo.

Wankan (Wankuan, Shiofu, Hito) - King's Crown or a proper name

The Kanji Wan(king, royal) kan(crown) is probably a proper name. Hence, no meaning in the kata's context. Its Okinawan name, Wankuan, means 'Pine Tree Wind'. Of Chinese origin. Most likely the 'Tiger fist' method of the Shaolin Temple, given the kata's powerful open hand techniques and swift evasive foot movements [MCC87]. Kata lineage to Shotokan is thru Matsumora.

Shuri-te

Heian (Peian, Pinan) - Peaceful Mind

A contraction of Heian-antei (peace and tranquillity). Once all five Heian's have been mastered, one would be confident (peaceful minded) that he is able to defend himself in most situations.

Developed by Itosu as a training kata suitable for physical education in the early 1900's. Where as, all dangerous techniques such as strikes to the groin or joints, attacks to the eyes, etc. have been eliminated. The Peians (Heians) were introduced in the P.E. curriculum of the Okinawan school system in 1905. Until then, were practicing Naihanchi (Tekki).

Some controversy on the reference kata used to model the Peians. Koshokun (Kanku) generally accepted as the reference. Most evident in Peian 4. Some communities places the reference as Passai (Bassai), given some of the advance techniques found in the Peians. Sensei Chozo Nakama stated, Itosu remodeled and simplified the kata Chiang Nan. The name was changed to Peian because of difficulty in pronunciation [BIS89].

Heian Shodan	[21 Moves]
Heian Nidan	[26 Moves]
Heian Sandan	[20 Moves]

⁴ In context, 'hands' usually mean 'technique'.

Heian Yodan	[27 Moves]
Heian Godan	[23 Moves]

[Tekki \(Naihanchi\) - Iron Horse Riding](#)

A primary feature of the 3 katas that make up the Tekkis, is a solid KIBA DACHI (horse riding stance). Appropriately, a direct reading of the kanji is Tetsu(Iron) ki(horse riding) or Tekki.

The origin of Naihanchi is not known. However, it is known that Itosu simplified Matsumura's version (Naihanchi Jo) and created two additional kata (Naihanchi Chu, Naihanchi Ge) from the Matsumura's model. The dangerous techniques were removed from these katas to make them suitable for physical education in the Okinawa school system. The equivalent Tekki have not restored these techniques.

Tekki Shodan	[29 Moves]
Tekki Nidan	[24 Moves]
Tekki Sandan	[35 Moves]

[Bassai Sho \(Passai Sho\) - To Thrust Asunder \(Minor\) \[27 Moves\]](#)

A variation of Bassai Dai created by Itsou.

[Kanku Dai \(Koshokun Dai\) - View the Sky \(Major\) \[65 Moves\]](#)

Originally named KOSHOKUN, the Okinawan name of Kung Siang Chun, a Chinese envoy to the Ryukyus during the Ming dynasty. He is credited with introducing the kata. Koshokun called the kata KWANKU (look to heaven), but in his honor, his Okinawan students name it after him.

In Shotokan, the kata is Kan(view) ku(sky) to represent the opening move of the kata, the raising of ones hands and looking to the sky.

Another interpretation is put forth by Sensei Mikami. He contends that looking up to the sky in the opening moves, only serve to remove one's eyes from his opponent. To be blinded by the sun. His interpretation on the meaning of KANKU, is to look up and view the warrior outlined by the sky (i.e. sun) after RYOTE FUSE (movement #43, going to ground to gain the advantage). This latter definition gives meaning to KANKU-SHO. Which does not have DAI's unique opening move.

[Kanku Sho \(Koshokun Sho\) - View the Sky \(Minor\) \[47 Moves\]](#)

A variation of Kanku Dai created by Itsou.

Meikyo (Rohai) - Polished Mirror [33 Moves]

Where as there are three Rohai (Rohai Jo, Rohai sho, Rohai Ge), there is only one Mei(Bright) kyo(mirror). All three Rohai where created by Itosu from the Rohai of Matsumura. Some controversy if the Rohai and Meikyo are related kata. Some moves are similar, others are quite different. No Rohai version has a defense against the Bo like Meikyo.

The name Meikyo, is apparently in reference to the symmetry of the kata.

Gankaku (Chinto) – Crane Standing on a Rock [42 Moves]

Since the kata in many of it's moves resemble a crane defending itself standing single legged on top of a rock, Master Funakoshi appropriately named it Gan(rock) kaku(crane). Legion has it that Matsumura developed the kata after meeting a shipwrecked Chinese sailor who instructed him in Kempo [MCC87]. In actuality, origin can not be completely ascertained. Most likely derived from a southern Chinese variant of the 'White Crane' school [MIT86].

Practice in many styles. Version adapted by Shotokan stems from Itosu. It's Okinawan name, CHINTO, means 'Fighting to the East'.

Chinte (Chinte) - Unusual Hands [33 Moves]

Originally called SHOIN by master Funakoshi. It's original Okinawan name Chin(unusual) te(hands) is now used. Appropriately name since the kata features wide circular movements and extensive use of the shoulders. Features unusual to Shotokan.

Gojushiho Dai (Gojushiho Sho) - 54 Steps (Major) [62 Moves]

Goju(50) shi(4) ho(steps) was taught by Itosu and originally named HOTAKU by Master Funakoshi. Perfected by Shito-ryu's founder Kenwa Mabuni (1889-1957) where it was name USESHI. Subsequently, it was borrowed from that system [HAS83].

The Order of the JKA Gojushiho-dai and Gojushiho-Sho are reversed with respect to the Shotokan Karate International (SKI) organization. According to Sensei Kanazawa "The creator called DAI the one including three consecutive techniques: RYU UN NO UKE, OSAE HAITO UKE, and SHIHON NUKITE. While SHO is performed with IPPON NUKITE" [KAN82]. Who is the creator was not stated, but can safely be assume to be Itosu for Gojushio-sho. Where as the SHO variation was created from the DAI model, DAI itself is of unknown Chinese origin.

Gojushiho Sho (Gojushiho Dai) - 54 Steps (Minor) [65 Moves]

See Gojushiho Dai.

Nijushiho (Niseshi, Neiseishi) - 24 Steps [33 Moves]

Niju(20) shi(4) ho(steps) is of unknown origin and classified with the group of katas (which includes Unsu and Sochin) traceable to Ankichi Aragaki (1899-1927). Borrowed by Master Funakoshi from the Shito Ryu system of Kenwa Mabuni [HAS83].

According to Sensei Enoeda, the kata is an expression on the nature of water in a stream or river. Sometimes depicting the slow, regal movements of the flowing water. At other times, it's strong and swift currents. The contrasting of the flow as it navigates around an obstruction [ENO83].

Sochin (Sochin) - Strong Calm [40 Moves]

Sometimes rendered as "rooted or immovable" in western text because of the kata's characteristic FUDO DACHI (rooted stance) also known as SOCHIN DACHI. However, the written kanji is more indicative of the true meaning of the kata. Given the form's slow (calm) deliberate blocks (MUSO GMAE and TATE SHUTO UKE) from a strong FUDO DACHI.

A kata of unknown origin, traceable to Ankichi Aragaki. Originally called HAKKO by Master Funakoshi. Modified and introduced to Shotokan by Yoshitaka Funakoshi.

Unsu (Unsu) - Cloud Hands [47 Moves]

Un(Cloud) shu(hand)⁵ implies one is able to sweep the hands (technique) of the opponent like clouds sweep across the sky. The "Cloud Hand" technique appears twice in the kata. First, after the opening HASAMI UKE (scissors block). Second, the double TATE SHUTO UKE (vertical sword hand block) after MIGI ASHI MAWASHI GERI (right round house kick) from the floor position. A kata of unknown origin, traceable to Ankichi Arakaki [HAS91]. Borrowed by Master Funakoshi from the Shito Ryu system of Kenwa Mabuni [RIE85].

Naha-te

Hangetsu (Sesan, Seisan, Seishan) - Crescent Moon [41 Moves]

Called Han(half) getsu(moon) because of its semi circle, or crescent like foot movements. A Goju Ryu styled kata of unknown origin.

⁵ 'Shu' is the same Kanji as 'Te' as in Karate. 'Shu' is the more normal reading.

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