

Kata Combat Article – Bunkai Training Drills Part 1

I state in 'Practical Applications for the Kata Jion' that Kata were originally intended to capture the 'highlights' of an effective combative system. The distillate of this system survived over generations as it had an inherent aid memoir that enabled the practitioner to communicate it to his incumbent generation. As a result of the balance needed between reliance on memory and the need to maintain the principles of Kata, an optimal and not limitless number of movements exist.

We expect Kata therefore to contain everything we need to effectively train for combat, but not necessarily laid out in an order that is immediately usable. We should however, acknowledge that the Kata exist as a suite of techniques bound by a strong theme of principles, and that to effectively use these techniques, we need to extract their highlights and entrench them in the kata.

This article attempts to prescribe some training drills that inherit benefit from the Kata. For example I'll walk you through a simple Bunkai training drill that is based on some key Kata Combat concepts. These concepts are explicitly identified in this article.

These techniques are best utilised when integrated into core fighting motions. Our approach should be that every Kata technique has a situational purpose and to derive optimal use from Kata training, that these kata techniques be extracted and practiced in Bunkai training drills. All Kata do, however have characteristics that form a common theme. It is important that we maximise the benefit of the training drill through exercising these theme characteristics within the training drill or drills.

The Kata techniques that we integrate into our existing offensive fighting motions should be motions that make up our main offensive artillery, like punching and striking. Common gross fighting techniques consist of fore fist type punches, open hand and club like strikes. These form the *primary* level attacks in our arsenal. Although these specific techniques are all found within Kata it's important to note that they are not always explicitly emphasised as their applicability and suitability is assumed elsewhere is the Kata.

We should acknowledge that in order to approach Kata Combat training seriously, we should be practicing our self-defence skills (physical) within our self-protection (non-physical) skills in the form of pre-emptive and in-fight strikes. We should choose to drill a small number of core strikes a large number of times to ensure quality and reliability in our offensive artillery. We should also be practicing offensive repetition of our core fighting techniques with forward drive to instill the mindset that our opponent can, and will remain a danger to us until sufficient pressure is applied to enable an escape. It is at this stage that our *secondary* level motions are utilised. Usually our secondary level motions are dictated by and are made in response to the outcomes of our primary strikes and are therefore executed out of necessity rather than choice.

With this in mind, I take my left cross (Reverse Punch) as the primary attacking technique. I then consider my opponent's various instinctive responses; in this drill I use three. In each case, my primary attack is succeeded by a series of secondary motions supporting my need to maintain and exploit combative advantage.

For the purpose of the drill, I suppose in each case, my opponent reacts to my initial strike by covering his head area with the arm positioned to best protect him from further follow up strikes. At this point that I will use a secondary technique (Downward Block) to clear this arm which is preventing me from striking successfully, to then expose the target again for the next primary level strike.



It must be stressed at this point that the above sequence should be executed with full commitment and confidence in the primary attack. Self doubting the effectiveness and outcome of the strikes can cloud the ability to then deal with the next stages of the fight. It is therefore important to progressively build on this drill to ensure that we are applying the Kata motions effectively. For this purpose, I have split the drill into stages.

For Stage 1, the drill can be practiced using focus pads enabling the techniques to be applied with maximum power and aggression whilst still having a training partner as the opponent. The initial strike is executed against the pad, my opponent then simulates the 'cover' by firmly placing his other hand flat against the pad. I then 'strip' this hand away in a downward block as directed in the Kata, creating another path through to the target for the next primary level strike.



This exercise is repeated several times to fully appreciate the idea of the opponent covering the target. However, I do not treat this simply as a memory and coordination exercise, executing one punch, one cover, then one further strike in that monotone order. I always intend to repeatedly strike the pad, until I need to take alternative action. When the target is covered, I react and strip my opponent's arm away, making way for another strike. My opponent may choose to only cover the target after I have struck it twice, thus varying the general rhythm of the techniques.

During this exercise, it may be that I hit the covering hand of my opponent, which is okay as long as I then take the alternative action and strip away his hand and not just continue hitting a null target.

To facilitate progression, my opponent starts to employ his own dynamic footwork and move around a bit. This forces me to engage my own footwork to ensure that my strike is executed from the optimal distance from my opponent.

It is here that I find the use of technique angles in Kata drills necessary. In the motion that strips my opponent's arm, I take the opportunity to pivot around slightly in the direction of his blind side – away from his free hand. This body shifting has three main benefits. Firstly it creates a more optimal path to the target as, from my opponent's

perspective, the source of the follow up strike has changed. Secondly, the body shifting forces me to lift my rear leg slightly, and thus my weight, and then, as the rear leg is grounded again, my body weight is dropped as I perform the stripping motion. I have a better chance of clearing a path to my opponent's target area, especially as his arm is not likely to be held up in a weak defensive position. Another advantage is that in stripping my opponent's arm down, I also cause them to lose his balance augmenting the advantage that I have created thus far. Furthermore, the sudden dropping of my weight facilitates a good base from which to launch the second primary level attack.

For Stage 2, I then address three further possible instinctive reactions from my opponent.

- A. Opponent covers again and reels back
- B. Opponent drives forward in attack
- C. Opponent drops to floor in a kneeling position

At this stage, I progress onto executing my secondary motions.

In case A where my opponent covers again and reels back, I step forward and use Shuto Uke (Knife Hand Block) as my initial secondary level strike. In case B, I retreat and utilise Gedan Barai (Downward Block) again but as a control and restraint movement to enable further strikes. Case C allows me to use Hiza Geri (Knee Kick) to create a good opportunity to escape.

Now Consider case A in more detail.



As my opponent retreats, his seized arm is brought up again to cover his head. I keep the connection between us by extending my seizing arm and step towards him, using the same arm to execute Shuto Uke (Knife Hand Block) to strike to the side of his neck/jaw. As I advance, I use my free rear hand to slap his seized hand from my grasp, clearing a path again for the secondary strike. It is important to note that the range at which I strike is closer than previously, as now my forearm is making contact with my opponent. Being this close it is imperative that I maintain control over my opponent's cleared arm as at this range, the fight is liable to degrade to a grappling affair. Pinning his arm across his torso hinders his ability to secure a close grip. This positioning also renders it difficult for my opponent to execute a troubling strike with his rear hand.

For simplicity, no further strikes are shown in this particular drill, but it must be acknowledged that a reasonable escape opportunity must be created through further exploitation of the advantage gained so far.



In case B above where my opponent drives towards me, I harness his momentum and retreat again, whilst keeping the connection between us. I pull and twist his seized arm towards my rear hip - in the standard *hikite* motion. In order to ensure that I maintain the required distance from my opponent and to avoid grappling, I allow the arm that I have seized to act as an indicator of my opponent's motion. I should feel the distance between us rapidly diminish and this triggers me to retreat. *Gedan Barai* (Downward Block) is employed with my free hand as a lock and to control his seized arm. Pivoting around in an arc on his blind side protects me from being overpowered by his initiated advance.

Again, for simplicity, no further strikes are shown in this particular drill, but it must be acknowledged that a reasonable escape opportunity must be created through further exploitation of the advantage I've gained so far.



Case C above is the most optimal outcome for me as it presents me with the greatest advantage over my opponent to escape. My opponent, being in the kneeling position whilst I stand over them, has only a limited ability to redress the imbalance. However it is vital that I still execute a secondary strike. By using my seizing hand, I can release the grip and instead secure it firmly on the back my opponent's head. Pushing firmly downwards limits my opponent's ability to stand back up, and provides a reference point for my secondary level strike - the knee kick. As in all kicks, it is vital that I remain in control of my body during the kick and do not become light on my support leg. I therefore keep the kick at a sensible height i.e. at waist level. My weight is driven into the kick and my kicking leg is grounded straight after contact.

Again, for simplicity, no further strikes are shown in this particular drill, but it must be acknowledged that a reasonable escape opportunity must be created through further exploitation of the advantage gained so far.

Stage 3 of the drill is to perform it with total variability. My opponent dictates when to 'cover' after my initial strike, and when they do move again, they choose which of the three instinctive responses to emulate. The key to this stage of the drill is for my opponent to be unpredictable and not to give away which of the three cases to present me. This can be achieved by not only varying the actual case, but also to vary the gap between finishing the strikes and reverting to the 'start' again.

My opponent can test the practicality of my stripping of their arm by varying the strength at which it is kept in place; and can test that my bodyweight shifting is kept strong and does not impede my follow up strike.

Although the focus pad is used so that the initial strike can be fired with full impact, there is value in executing a controlled version of the above scenarios without the use of a focus pad. It allows to me to see and feel my initial strike landing (or not as the case may be) on the desired target.

An important note regarding Bunkai training drills is that they should be focussed and that they apply sound combat principles extracted from Kata. The premise is that the combative skill is acquired through executing the drill. The drills must also be kept simple and be scalable. Simplicity allows us to focus on the key principles and scalability allows us to extend these concepts in appreciation of just how chaotic combat is. Taking a stepwise approach to the drill and applying progression ensures that we are better equipped to deal with the chaos of combat. The ultimate manner in which to run a drill is where it best emulates reality whilst being bound by adequate control and safety. The drills have to be run live in order to satisfy these criteria and thus reap the associated benefits.

It is also important to establish what your own offensive primary striking motions and techniques are. Through hard training in these motions, a solid foundation from which to build is laid, and forms the basis of drills. The main focus of this drill was to integrate Kata motions as secondary level techniques into these already established primary level motions. In each of the three instinctive response cases, my chosen secondary level attacks are taken from kata, are not fixed, are consistently applied and are fit for purpose.

These techniques and concepts are all derived from the Kata Enpi (Wanshu). A full eBook break down of this Kata is currently in development and will be available for download on www.Rakesh-Patel.com

I hope this article serves a good starting point to incorporate, or better utilise, the techniques found in Kata into your Bunkai training drills. I encourage you to devise drills based around sequences and techniques found in kata, and integrate these as supporting techniques to your primary striking motions.

That concludes the first article in the **Kata Combat – Bunkai Training Drills** series. Further articles in this series will be available to download on www.Rakesh-Patel.com and will be communicated in the Newsletters.

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