

A study of the kata Chinte

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Introduction

The name Chinte (also Chintei, Chinti; Mariti, Nante in Okinawan) 珍手 means: “strange / weird / rare / unusual / amazing / incredible / extraordinary hand(s)”. The name refers to a number of hand techniques that are found nowhere else in Shotokan kata as well as several more techniques that occur very rarely in other Shotokan kata. These unusual features made it especially interesting for an in-depth individual study during the 2020 Coronavirus lockdown

In addition to Shotokan, Chinte is also found in the curricula of other styles, including Kobayashi Shorin-ryu (Okinawan) and Shito-ryu (Japanese), each having several distinguishing variations which are described below. Within Kobayashi-ryu, Chinte is reported as being taught by Higa Yuchoku (1910 – 1995) of the Kyudokan Shinkokai branch.¹ The Kobayashi Shorin-ryu Kyudokan version (performed by Nashiro Masami) is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHNi1q1nSVC>. A Shito-ryu version (performed by Sebastián Peralta) is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4olfuMjzq-Y>.

Chinte is the only Shotokan kata whose starting and finishing postures differ from one another: its initial posture is known as Te Suigetsu Kamae (*i.e.* hands on solar-plexus posture), while its final posture is Jodan Tsutsumi Ken (*i.e.* upper-level hand around the fist), the same as that used to begin and end Jion, Ji'in and Jitte. According to Scott Langley, it is believed that Kanku-dai, the other Shotokan kata that might share this distinction, originally used the conventional Yoi posture, and the two-handed lower-level triangular block then formed the start of the first move.²

Origins of Chinte

A conjecture of Rob Redmond is that Chinte derives from an Okinawan folk dance demonstrating how a young woman should behave towards her husband and family.³

However, the circular, open-hand, single-knuckle and spear-finger techniques are suggestive of southern Chinese origin(s) or influence(s), in particular the white crane boxing (*bai he qu'an*) and praying mantis boxing (*tang lang qu'an*) styles of *gong fu*.

The one-legged crane stance with outstretched arms, representing a crane hunting for fish while shading the water with its wings, is characteristic of many of the Okinawan Hakutsuru (white crane) kata brought from Fujian Province in south-east China, as demonstrated here by George Alexander (at 1:00): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ieQae1MA6ec>

A two-finger mantis hook, representing the antennae of the praying mantis, can be used to strike both eyes simultaneously in Taiji Mantis, as demonstrated here by Master Zhou Zhen Dong (at 6:35): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7h_9qsgN6g&t=9s. However, Master Funakoshi also mentions the two-finger thrust (Nihon-tsuki) “to attack both of the enemy’s eyes” in his master text *Karate Do Kyohan*.⁴

¹ Christopher M. Clarke, *Okinawan Karate: a history of styles and masters*, Vol.1, 2011, p.175.

² Scott Langley, webinar “Chinte & Bunkai” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zYJGn9QmjSc> (at 1:24:23).

³ Rob Redmond, “Kata: the Folk Dances of Shotokan”, 2006, pp.267-8: https://bu-do.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The_Kata_Book_2008-03-26op.pdf

⁴ Funakoshi Gichin, *Karate Do Kyohan* (1935) section 2, chapter 2; trans. H Suzuki-Johnson (2005) p.20.

Crucially, according to a 1914 newspaper article by Gichin Funakoshi (1868-1957), writing under his *nom-de-plume* of 'Shoto', and based upon the recollections of his teacher Anko Asato (1827-1906):

"A Fujian-Chinese from Annan who drifted to Okinawa taught Chinto [*i.e.* Gankaku] to Gusukuma and Kanagusuku in Tomari. This same Fujian-Chinese teacher also taught **Chinte** to Matsumora and Oyadomari, while Yamasato learned Ji'in and Nakasato was taught Jitte. As he was anxious to return home to China the teacher from Annan taught different kata to different people."⁵

For the avoidance of confusion, note that scholars believe that the "Matsumora" in the excerpt above refers to Kosaku Matsumora of Tomari (1829-1898), rather than Sokon ('Bushi') Matsumura of Shuri (1809-1899). Tomari was an Okinawan seaport and police HQ dealing with pirates and smugglers, while Shuri was the Ryukyu islands' royal capital providing the palace guards for the castle. The martial training for these different roles would have been quite distinct.

In fact, Chinte is also briefly mentioned by Funakoshi in his first ever newspaper article from 1913:

"The kata common today in our Okinawa are Sanchin, Seisan [*i.e.* Hangetsu], Naihanchi [*i.e.* Tekki], Pinan [*i.e.* Heian], Passai [*i.e.* Bassai], Kusanku [*i.e.* Kanku], Useishi [*i.e.* Gojushiho], Chinto [*i.e.* Gankaku], **Chinte**, Ji'in, Jitte, Wansu [*i.e.* Enpi], Wando, Pechurin, and the like."⁶

The Chinese origins of Chinte are corroborated by Funakoshi's Okinawan contemporary Choki Motobu who wrote in 1932 that: "Sanchin, Useishi [*i.e.* Gojushiho], Seisan [*i.e.* Hangetsu], Seiunchin and Pechurin are all from China and, apparently, still practiced there. However, it is said that Naihanchi [*i.e.* Tekki], Bassai, Chinto [*i.e.* Gankaku], **Chinte**, Wanshu [*i.e.* Enpi], Rohai [*i.e.* Meikyo] and Kusanku [*i.e.* Kanku] no longer exist in China and are now practiced only in Okinawa."⁷

Although Chinte does not appear in Funakoshi's detailed syllabus of 15 basic kata (in *Karate Do Kyohan*, 1935), it is mentioned in passing in both of his early books (*Ryukyu Kenpo Karate*, 1922 and *Rentan Goshin Karate Jutsu*, 1925).⁸ However, it does not appear to be included as a compulsory kata in any present day dan grading syllabuses. For reasons that are not well understood, Funakoshi unsuccessfully attempted to rename Chinte to Shoin ('a place of study in a temple').⁹ One possible explanation for this is that the name Chinte draws attention to the unusual hand techniques many of which are evidently of Chinese origin; this would not have assisted the kata's adoption in mainland Japan during the 1920s and 1930s when Chinese associations were politically unpopular (hence also the change in the spelling of 'kara-te' from 'Chinese [T'ang] hand' 唐手 to 'empty hand' 空手, which was officially ratified in December 1933). He may have chosen the name Shoin because of its temple reference, reflecting the similarity of its final posture with that of Jion ('temple sound' or 'temple mercy') and Ji'in ('temple grounds'). However, Funakoshi's senior students did not accept his name change, perhaps because the original name seemed so very appropriate, and its name reverted to Chinte.

⁵ Shoto, "Okinawa no Bugi. Asato Anko-uji Dan" (Martial Arts Technique of Okinawa. Recollecting the Words of Asato Anko), Part 2, *Ryukyu Shinpo*, January 18, 1914, #4908, trans. Patrick McCarthy, in "Tanpenshu: the Master's Finest Work", IRKRS (2006) pp.16-17.

⁶ Shoto, "Karate wa Bugei no Kotsuzui nari" (Karate is the Bone Marrow of Martial Arts). *Ryukyu Shinpo*, January 9, 1913, #4534, trans. Andreas Quast (2020).

⁷ Motobu Choki, "Watashi no Karate-jutsu" (1932), *Karate My Art*, trans. Patrick McCarthy, IRKRS (2006) p.82.

⁸ Joe Swift, "Roots of Shotokan: Funakoshi's Original 15 Kata, Part 1 – Classification and Knowledge of Kata" <http://www.fightingarts.com/reading/article.php?id=220>

⁹ http://shotokankaratecl.com/Kata_18_-_Chinte.html



Analysis (bunkai) and Application (oyo) of Chinte

The Shorin-ryu version of Chinte is likely to be the closest to what the “Fujian-Chinese teacher from Annan” (see above) originally taught to Matsumora and Oyadomari in Tomari, since it has remained on Okinawa with no reason to be altered. The kata was taken from Okinawa to mainland Japan in the 1920s separately by Kenwa Mabuni (in Osaka) and Gichin Funakoshi (in Tokyo). Mabuni’s Shito-ryu version is quite similar to the Shorin-ryu version, whereas Funakoshi’s Shotokan version (as we now have it) has been changed significantly. It is possible that the version originally taught by Funakoshi was quite similar to the Shorin-ryu and Shito-ryu versions, but was subsequently modified (perhaps by his son Yoshitaka / Gigo) to make it more suitable for use in competitions between local university karate clubs, in particular the introduction of the three final diagonally backwards hops that return the performer to their starting position; however, this is pure speculation as no films or written descriptions of the Shotokan version of Chinte from the 1930s or 1940s are known.

While the enbusen of both the Shorin ryu and Shito ryu versions of Chinte forms the shape of a straight line with a single projection to the right, the enbusen of Shotokan’s Chinte is more complicated with four steps in the left-right direction which are not symmetrically placed about the centre line:



The 36 moves in the Shotokan version of Chinte will be analysed and applied in sequence:

0. Heisoku Dachi Te Suigetsu Kamae [YOI]: this is similar to Koshi Gamae as used in Heian Nidan, Heian Yondan, Kanku Dai, Kanku Sho and Sochin, immediately before the Uraken – Yokogeri Keage – Empi Uchi combination; one application is to intercept a punch or shove by trapping our opponent’s wrist (palm-up) against our solar plexus with our lower hand (also palm-up) and then setting their wrist (fingers-up) with our top hand, destabilising their balance and bringing their head towards us.
1. Heisoku Dachi Migi Tate Tetsui Uchi: the base of the opponent’s neck (kyusho point LI17) is now in prime position for the dropping hammer-fist; tetsui is also found in Heian Shodan.
2. Heisoku Dachi Hidari Tate Tetsui Uchi: the preceding two techniques should also be practised on the opposite side.
3. Kiba Dachi Awase Shuto Age Uke: if the attacker slips from our wrist hold and begins to throw round-house head shots, this flinch reaction will temporarily cover both sides of our face; it is also used in Kanku Dai.

4. Fudo Dachii Migi Tate Shuto Uke: we feel for our opponent's head and push it away to our right also turning it away from us; this will make it difficult for him to continue his attack.
5. Zenkutsu Dachii Tate Ken Gyaku Zuki: once he is at arm's length, we slip our right hand behind his neck to form a vertical 'wall' and punch his throat with our vertical left fist to crush his larynx. Tate ken zuki also appears in Heian Sandan as a ushiro technique.
6. Fudo Dachii Hidari Tate Shuto Uke: the preceding two techniques should also be practised on the opposite side.
7. Zenkutsu Dachii Tate Ken Gyaku Zuki: (as above)
8. Fudo Dachii Migi Tate Shuto Uke: if the previous technique was successfully parried, we again turn his face away to stop more head shots.
9. Zenkutsu Dachii Gyaku Age Empi Uchi [KIAI]: this time we form a horizontal 'wall' above his head and drive our rising left elbow into his chin (aiming for a KO on the kyusho point ST5). This technique is also used in Gankaku, and in Nijushiho and Gojushiho sho/dai without the 'wall' with the aim to cause whiplash.
10. Kokutsu Dachii Hidari Chudan Shuto Uke: the 180° turn can be used as a take-down or throw by grasping his neck firmly with the right hand behind and the left hand in front, turning sharply on the spot, and then releasing it with a push– pull action.
11. Kokutsu Dachii Migi Chudan Shuto Uke: A new scenario – a right-handed punch or shove is intercepted with our left forearm and their left elbow is trapped at our solar plexus by our hikite hand (palm-up) while our right hand strikes shuto to their neck.
12. Hidari Chudan Maegeri: We are now at close range so the follow-up maegeri can operate in up to four phases: the knee raise strikes their groin, the forwards motion strikes the inside of their knee with the outer edge of our foot (sokuto-geri), the return motion strikes the back of their knee with our heel (kakato-geri), and replacing our foot stomps their metatarsals.
13. Zenkutsu Dachii Kosa Uke: the cross-blocking technique can be used to lock or dislocate the opponent's trapped arm at their elbow; it also appears in Heian Sandan.
14. Heisoku Dachii Naiwan Sukui Uke: while our left hand returns to our hip to control their trapped lower arm by their wrist (palm-up), our right arm releases from their upper arm and arcs downwards to strike the outside of their left thigh with the inside of our forearm (the radius), and then continues swinging through and round...
15. Heisoku Dachii Gedan Tetsui Uchi: this pair of continuous flowing techniques ends with a circular hammer-fist strike impacting the outside of the opponent's left thigh; both techniques could aim for one of the kyusho points GB31 or GB32 to assist in destabilising their balance (kuzushi).
16. Kiba Dachii Morote Haito Barai: with their balance partially compromised we strike using shuto-uke with our right hand to their neck aiming for kyusho point GB20 while our left hand goes under their right armpit and upwards behind their right shoulder blade; as we step back and turn 90° clockwise into kiba dachi we lower our centre of gravity and turn their body, folding it into the space we have created between us so that they land on their back with their head pointing to our left.
17. Kiba Dachii Morote Haito Barai: the preceding technique should also be practised on the opposite side.
18. Kiba Dachii Ryowan Uchi Uke: A new scenario, the opponent makes a two-handed grab or push which we attempt to strip upwards. The leftward shift helps destabilise him. However, this may be unsuccessful, or the double grab /push may be repeated by our opponent.
19. Hidari Tsuru Dachii Ryowan Gamae: this closely resembles the Chinese 'white crane spreads its wings' posture (see above); our right knee attacks the opponent's groin, stabilised by our hooked right foot, while our two arms strip the opponent's double grab / push downwards.

20. Zenkutsu Dachii Migii Naka Daka Ippon Ken Otoshi Uchi: the downward middle-knuckle strike can activate the central kyusho point CV22 in the opponent's suprasternal notch.
21. Zenkutsu Dachii Hidarii Naka Daka Ippon Ken Otoshi Uchi: the preceding technique should also be practised with the opposite hand to the same target.
22. Zenkutsu Dachii Hanmii Jodan Migii Nihon Nukite Uchi Uke: this technique can be used to strike upwards into the opponent's throat; however, applying hikite will expose the right side of the opponent's neck, allowing the carotid artery and the jugular vein to be attacked.
23. Zenkutsu Dachii Jodan Hidarii Nihon Nukite: as per Funakoshi's description of Nihon-tsuki (see above) this technique is used to simultaneously strike both of the opponent's eyes.
24. Zenkutsu Dachii Hanmii Jodan Hidarii Nihon Nukite Uchi Uke: the preceding two techniques should also be practised on the opposite side.
25. Zenkutsu Dachii Jodan Migii Nihon Nukite: (as above)
26. Fudo Dachii Chudan Migii Teisho Uchi: attack the opponent's left-side internal organs under their floating ribs.
27. Zenkutsu Dachii Chudan Hidarii Teisho Uchi: attack the opponent's right-side internal organs under their floating ribs; the combined effect of these two techniques is similar to the low-level simultaneous move in Hangetsu.
28. Zenkutsu Dachii Ryo Te Ushiro Hasami Uchi: as our opponent aims to shove or grab us with both hands, we intercept our opponent's forearms and pull them towards us administering a headbutt to one of their temples¹⁰; this move is also found in Gojushiho sho/dai
29. Fudo Dachii Ryo Te Hasami Uchi [KIAI]: according to Kenwa Mabuni,¹¹ angles in a kata can indicate the angle from which one should approach one's opponent, rather than the angle from which they approach us, so a 180° turn can represent getting behind one's opponent; hence we now attack our opponent's kidneys from the rear simultaneously from both sides.
30. Fudo Dachii Migii Tate Shuto Uke: we control the back of our opponent's head with our right hand.
31. Zenkutsu Dachii Tate Ken Hidarii Gyaku Zuki: we form a vertical 'wall' against our opponent's chin with our right hand and then strike the axis and/or atlas bones at the base of his skull with a vertical left fist, justifying the repetition here of this technique from early in the kata.
32. Fudo Dachii Hidarii Tate Shuto Uke: the preceding two techniques should also be practised on the opposite side.
33. Zenkutsu Dachii Tate Ken Migii Gyaku Zuki: (as above)
34. Heisoku Dachii Jodan Tsutsumi Ken {pulling front leg straight back}: this technique can be used as a wrist lock, an elbow lock, a shoulder lock, a rear neck choke, or a side neck strangle.¹²
35. Yori Ashi x 3 {three diagonally backwards hops to the right} [YAME]: although probably added to enable a return to the starting position, these hops can be plausibly interpreted as repeatedly shock-loading the preceding arm lock or rear choke.^{13 14}

The main differences from Shotokan of both the Shorin ryu and Shito ryu versions are the omitted final three hops, and the first pair of nihon tsuki thrusts are made by the left hand followed by the right hand; ryo te suihei chudan barai also replaces ryo te ushiro hasami uchi. The Shito ryu version uses shiko dachi instead of kiba dachi, and neko ashi dachi instead of both fudo dachi and kokutsu dachi. It also uses ushiro

¹⁰ David Gomez, "Karate & Self-Defence", Shotokan Karate Magazine, No.101 (October 2009) pp.20-23 (photos).

¹¹ Mabuni Kenwa, "Kobo Kenpo Karate-do Nyumon" (1938) pp.139-140, trans. Joe Swift (1998):

<http://www.fightingarts.com/forums/ubbthreads.php?ubb=printthread&Board=10&main=8683&type=thread>

¹² Paul Willoughby, "Kata Bunkai", Shotokan Karate Magazine, No.101 (October 2009), pp.26-29 (photos).

¹³ Paul Lopresti, "Chinte Hops & Bassai Dai Opening", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tiWoYkoM5oM>

¹⁴ Leigh Simms, "Chinte Karate Kata Bunkai - The Three Hops!", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h6mDhko4Pw8>

gedan shuto instead of morote haito barai. The Shorin ryu version uses migi gedan zuki instead of the kosa uke, sukui uki, tetsui uchi sequence, and chudan juji-uke instead of the two naka daka ken otoshi uchi.

Although the starting and finishing postures of a kata are traditionally regarded as a ritual greeting or a respectful salutation without an application, the fact that there are no fewer than 9 distinct starting and finishing postures within the 26 Shotokan kata suggests that this may not always be the case and that there may be some combative significance associated with them, as proposed here for Chinte.¹⁵

The applications suggested above are intended for street self-defence as indicated by another of Funakoshi's teachers, Anko Itosu (1832-1915), when he wrote in the first of his Ten Precepts of Karate, dated 1908, that:

"Karate is ... a way of avoiding injury by using the hands and feet should one by any chance be confronted by a villain or ruffian".¹⁶

As such, the techniques are potentially dangerous and for realistic two-person dojo practice the Uke needs to be equipped with a helmet, visor, neck guard and abdominal protector for their own safety. However, even for solo performances of the kata, visualising the potential applications of each move or sequence should serve to enhance the focus, intensity and intentionality of the performance.

Final thoughts

My study of Chinte has convinced me that, although it does not require great physical prowess or exhibit spectacular techniques, this kata is full of self-defence techniques which can be used to devastating effect by a wide range of individuals, including women, children, the elderly and people with mobility issues, against more powerful opponents. Quite apart from its intrinsic interest, it also commands respect for the efficacy of its techniques in attacking an opponent's vulnerable targets.

Additional resources available

Full-length Chinte application DVDs have been made by John Burke, Vince Morris and Paul Bowman

"Bunkai Strategies" Youtube clips by John Burke

"Practical Kata Bunkai" Youtube clips by Iain Abernethy

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bun bu ryo do (文武両道) – "writing and fighting, both ways"

¹⁵ Richard Overill, "The Different Yoi Positions in Shotokan Kata", Shotokan Karate Magazine, No.129 (October 2016), pp.30-31.

¹⁶ Itosu Anko, "Tode Jukun" (1908): <https://martialhistoryteam.blogspot.com/2020/06/comparing-translations-of-itosus-ten.html>