

# A study of the kata Ji'in

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## Introduction

During lockdown 3.0, I decided to study the little practised Shotokan kata Ji'in and its relationship to other kata from Shotokan and other styles of karate.

The name Ji'in has several possible meanings: the *kanji* 寺院 means 'temple grounds' while the alternative *kanji* 慈隠 means 'hidden, or secret, mercy'. However, in his 1925 book *Rentan Goshin Karate Jutsu*, Funakoshi mentions Ji'in and, like many of the kata at that time, he gives its name in the phonetic script *katakana* (ジーン), rather than in *kanji*, suggesting that only the pronunciation of the name was known, but not its meaning. Ji'in was not included in Funakoshi's 1935 master text *Karate Do Kyohan*, and also, like Wankan, it was not included in Nakayama's Best Karate series.

## Origins and Development

A report in the Ryukyu Shinpo newspaper on the Karate Convention of the Normal School on January 24, 1911 includes Ji'in in the list of 15 katas being taught as part of the physical education curriculum.<sup>1</sup>

Writing under his *nom de plume* of Shoto, Gichin Funakoshi (1868–1957) lists Ji'in amongst 14 of the most popular katas on Okinawa in a 1913 newspaper article.<sup>2</sup> In a subsequent 1914 newspaper article,<sup>3</sup> he also reports that his teacher Anko Asato (1827–1906) recollected that a Fujian based Chinese or Vietnamese man (possibly either named or from Annan) who was shipwrecked on Okinawa taught Ji'in to Gikei Yamazato (1835–1905) of Tomari. Funakoshi added to this in his 1922 book *Karate Jitsu*:

"It is confirmed through written documents and collections that ... Shiroma [= Gusukuma in Okinawan] of Tomari, Kaneshiro, Matsumora, Yamazato and others trained under Taika, who originated from Fukushu-an-nan."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Andreas Quast, "Tokuda Ante'i's Memorandum". <http://ryukyu-bugei.com/?p=7324>

<sup>2</sup> Shoto, "Karate wa Bugei no Kotsuzui nari" (Karate is the Essence of Martial Arts). Ryukyu Shinpo, January 9, 1913, #4534, trans. Joe Swift, in "Itosu Anko: Savior of a Cultural Heritage", Lulu (2019), pp.205-209.

<sup>3</sup> Shoto, "Okinawa no Bugei. 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.15-17.

<sup>4</sup> Gichin Funakoshi, *To-Te Jitsu* (1922) trans. Shingo Ishida / Kenneth B. Tallack, Masters Publication (1997), p.18.

Another of Funakoshi's teachers, Anko Itosu (1831–1915), is believed to have acquired Ji'in from two Tomari based masters: Matsumora and Gusukuma [= Shiroma in Japanese], who presumably learned it from Yamazato (as recorded above). Funakoshi helpfully mentions that Itosu studied with Gusukuma / Shiroma in two of his books.<sup>5 6</sup> Three of Anko Itosu's senior students, Gichin Funakoshi (Shotokan), Kenwa Mabuni (Shito-ryu) and Kanken Toyama (Shudokan) each separately imported Ji'in into mainland Japan during the late 1920s and the 1930s.<sup>7</sup>

A Shito-ryu kata list dating from ca.1939 by Kenwa Mabuni (1889–1952) includes Ji'in (under the heading: Itosu lineage).<sup>8</sup> In his book *Karate Do Nyumon* (Introduction to Karate-do) Gichin Funakoshi reports that Ji'in was amongst ten katas currently being "studied and investigated" at his dojo, the Shotokan, in Tokyo in 1943.<sup>9 10</sup> Although the founder of Shudokan, Kanken Toyama (1888–1966), did not include Ji'in in his own books, he nevertheless passed Ji'in on to three of his senior students (Hiramatsu, Ichikawa and Tsuchiya).<sup>11</sup> Itosu-ryu Karate-do was founded by Ryusho Sakagami (1915–1993) in 1940 as an offshoot of Shito-ryu and also includes Ji'in in its syllabus.<sup>12</sup>

Judging from the interviews and surveys reported by Christopher Clarke<sup>13</sup> and Mark Bishop<sup>14</sup>, it appears that the kata Ji'in is no longer practised by any of the ryuha located in Okinawa.

Funakoshi's later attempt to rename Ji'in to Shokyo (松陰, 'pine shadow') was not successful, despite the fact that its first kanji is the same as that in his *nom de plume* Shoto (松濤, 'pine waves').

There is clearly a relationship between Ji'in, Jion and Jitte – they all make use of the same Ming (明) salutation (the open left hand covering the right fist representing the Moon and Sun respectively, expressing the yin–yang duality of Chinese Taoist philosophy). They also share many similar techniques, so much so that Ji'in has been described as "Jion sho" by Rob Redmond.<sup>15</sup> It has the 3 stepping mawashi-shuto strikes in kiba-dachi, similar to the 3 teisho (palm heel) strikes in both Jion and Jitte, and the 2 back-to-back manji-uke (swastika) techniques with Jitte; like Jion, it starts with a backwards stepping kosa-uke (cross block) and includes a pair of

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p.18.

<sup>6</sup> Funakoshi Gichin, *Karate-do Kyohan* (1935); trans. H Suzuki-Johnson (2005); section 1, chapter 3, p.8.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.toyama-book.org/blog/jitte-jiin-jion>

<sup>8</sup> <http://ryukyu-bugei.com/?p=5404>

<sup>9</sup> Jesse Enkamp, *Legends of Karate: Mabuni Kenwa and his Shitō-Ryū* (pt. 4);

<https://www.karatebyjesse.com/legends-of-karate-mabuni-kenwa-and-his-shito-ryu-pt-4/>

<sup>10</sup> Gichin Funakoshi, *Karate Do Nyumon* (Introduction to Karate-do), 1943, trans. John Teramoto, Kodansha Intl., 1993, p.49.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.toyama-book.org/blog/jitte-jiin-jion>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.itosu-ryu.net/kata>

<sup>13</sup> Christopher M. Clarke, *Okinawan Karate: a history of styles and masters*, Vol.1, 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Mark D. Bishop, *Okinawan Karate: teachers, styles and secret techniques*, 3<sup>rd</sup>.edn. 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Rob Redmond, *Kata: the folk dances of Shotokan*, 2008, pp.233-239. [https://bu-do.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The\\_Kata\\_Book\\_2008-03-26op.pdf](https://bu-do.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The_Kata_Book_2008-03-26op.pdf)

diagonally oriented kaki-wake-uke (wedge blocks) in zenkutsu-dachi each followed by a maegeri and either 2 or 3 punches.

Funakoshi wrote in his 1925 book *Rentan Goshin Karate Jutsu* that:

“The forms commonly practised today are the Pinan [*i.e.* Heian] in 5 stages; Naihanchi [*i.e.* Tekki] in 3 stages; Passai [*i.e.* Bassai] divided into Dai (large) and Sho (small); Kushanku [*i.e.* Kanku] also divided into Dai and Sho; and several individual forms like Gojushiho, Seishan [*i.e.* Hangetsu], Chinto [*i.e.* Gankaku], Chinteh [*i.e.* Chinte], Ji'in, Jitte, Jion, Wanshu [*i.e.* Enpi], Wandau, Rohai [*i.e.* Meikyo], Jiyumu, Wando, Sochin, Nijushi [*i.e.*, Nijushiho], Sanjuroku, Hyaku-rei-hachi, Wankuan, Kokan, Unshu [*i.e.* Unsu] and Sanshinto. Some of these forms, or kata, are simply derivative, resulting more or less from changes made to other kata”.<sup>16</sup>

This list contains 32 katas so this kind of adaptation may have been a traditional practice in the past, offering the possibility that the trio of Ji'in, Jitte and Jion may have had a common ancestor, possibly originating from Fujian province in south-eastern China, although it has not been identified at the present time.

It is worth noting that the SKIF version of Ji'in differs from the JKA version in the way the last four kosa-uke techniques are performed; The JKA version always places the gedan barai of the kosa-uke over the front foot, whereas after the initial move the SKIF version does the opposite (placing uchi-uke over the leading foot) for the 3 following kosa-uke techniques and reversing the hand positions of the final kosa-uke in kiba-dachi. The SKIF version follows the Shito-ryu version in this respect, except that the third 180° turn and the following 45° degree tate-shuto, double punch, maegeri, gyaku-tsuki, kosa-uke sequence is replaced by a triple punch to the left in shiko-dachi (sumo stance) in the Shito-ryu version.

Ji'in is unique in containing a direct jodan punch, as the penultimate technique in the Shotokan version. However, the Shotokan version appears to be missing 4 techniques (age-uke, oi-zuki, first to the left and then to the right) at the very end of the kata, in comparison with the Shito-ryu version, which can be seen here:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQ3S2GeEiok&ab\\_channel=JuanBeltránRodríguez](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQ3S2GeEiok&ab_channel=JuanBeltránRodríguez)

It will also be noticed that the Shito-ryu version uses neko-ashi-dachi (cat's paw stance) for both the kaki-wake-uke techniques, instead of kokutsu-dachi in the Shotokan version.

### **Analysis (bunkai) and suggested applications (oyo) of the JKA version**

0. jodan tsutsumi ken (heisoku-dachi) [YOI]: with our opponent in kamae we divert their leading fist away from us with our opposite hand by folding it back towards their wrist; our other hand brings their elbow in towards our centre and then caps their bent wrist as a controlling wrist-lock, assisted by rubbing kyusho point LI3 behind their index finger knuckle towards their middle finger.

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<sup>16</sup> Gichin Funakoshi, *Rentan Goshin Karate Jutsu*, 1925, trans. John Teramoto, Kodansha Intl., 2001, pp.26-27.

1. kosa-uke (migi zenkutsu-dachi): this move mirrors the first move of Jion, but with the hands reversed; our back leg acts as a wedge stabilising the forward motion of the kosa-uke; suppose we fail to get the wrist lock in step 0 so our opponent is able to grab our gi with their leading hand; we trap their grabbing arm with an outside-to-inside motion of our arm on the same side, twisting our torso to reduce the threat from their opposite fist; our other fist's thumb knuckle now strikes the inside of their trapped elbow (at kyusho point HT3) and continues under their elbow and upwards, turning over to make uchi-uke, while our trapping arm turns downwards to make gedan-barai, creating an elbow lock.
2. manji-uke (hidari kokutsu-dachi): around 15 two-person close-range applications of a single manji-uke have been demonstrated by John Burke;<sup>17</sup> however, a pair of back-to-back manji-gamae techniques like (2–3) also occurs in Jitte and Bassai-sho; a possible application of (2–3) is to receive a left hook to the head with jodan-uke while pressing down on the opponent's neck with gedan-barai, forming the first manji-uke; continuing this motion circularly, our jodan-uke arm guides their attacking arm upwards through the vertical while our gedan-barai arm takes their neck downwards, at which point their balance collapses and as we take them to the ground our arms cross and we form the second manji-uke facing the opposite direction:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IUIUOpbZVs&ab\\_channel=JohnBurke](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IUIUOpbZVs&ab_channel=JohnBurke)
3. manji-uke (migi kokutsu-dachi)
4. hidari age-uke (hanmi) turning 135° anticlockwise: the pair of techniques (4–5) also occurs in Jion; a possible application of (4–5) is to escape from a clinch by using our right palm to push our opponent's head backwards exposing their chin which we then strike with our left age-uke; as they reel backwards we use our left hand to pull (or push) their head downwards to our left and step forwards with oizuki to their neck.
5. migi oizuki (zenkutsu-dachi)
6. migi age-uke (hanmi) turning 90° clockwise: the previous pair of techniques (4–5) should also be practised on the opposite side.
7. hidari oizuki (zenkutsu-dachi)
8. hidari gedan-barai (hanmi) turning 45° anticlockwise: no fewer than 75 separate applications of gedan barai have been given by Rick Clark;<sup>18</sup> suppose our opponent grabs our right wrist with their left hand (preparatory to hitting us with their right fist), then a left gedan-barai strike against the back of their left elbow will turn their body away from us exposing their left flank for...
9. migi shuto-soto-mawashi-uchi (migi kiba-dachi): a set of 3 techniques similar to (9–11) is also found in Jion and Jitte except that both use teisho rather than mawashi-shuto; these 3 techniques can be interpreted as attacking our opponent's internal organs on both flanks by striking at or just below the level of their floating ribs.
10. hidari shuto-soto-mawashi-uchi (hidari kiba-dachi)
11. migi shuto-soto-mawashi-uchi (migi kiba-dachi) [KIAI]

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/KarateJohnBurke/videos/10155667711414079>

<sup>18</sup> Rick Clark, 75 Down Blocks: Refining Karate Technique, Tuttle Martial Arts (2003).

12. ryoken kakiwake-uke (zenkutsu-dachi) turning 135° anti-clockwise; the group of 5 techniques (12–16) resembles the 2<sup>nd</sup> group of techniques in Jion except that the final punch is replaced by kosa-uke; the kakiwake-uke can be seen as a choke or strangle crossing-over the opposite sides of their collar, followed by a knee strike and kicking out their front leg, a double punch, and finally a move in which our gedan-barai hand strikes downwards onto the side of our opponent's neck while our uchi-uke hand drives upwards underneath their opposite armpit; the effect is to lock-up our opponent to control them.
13. migi maegeri (zenkutsu-dachi)
14. migi oizuki (zenkutsu-dachi)
15. hidari gyaku-zuki (zenkutsu-dachi)
16. kosa-uke (zenkutsu-dachi)
17. ryoken kakiwake-uke (zenkutsu-dachi) turning 90° clockwise; the previous group of 5 techniques (12–16) should also be practised on the opposite side, as also in Jion.
18. hidari maegeri (zenkutsu-dachi)
19. hidari oizuki (zenkutsu-dachi)
20. migi gyaku-zuki (zenkutsu-dachi)
21. kosa-uke (zenkutsu-dachi)
22. migi tetsui-uchi-mawashi-uchi (kiba-dachi) right inside hammer-fist strike spinning 225° clockwise: the 3 techniques (22–24) can be interpreted as demonstrating 3 counters to single wrist grabs; in the first example, our left wrist is grabbed and we spin away from the expected follow-up punch and strike our opponent in their solar plexus with a right hammer-fist strike.
23. hidari tetsui-uchi-mawashi-uchi (kiba-dachi) left inside hammer-fist strike spinning 180° anti-clockwise: in the second example, our right wrist is grabbed and we spin away from the expected follow-up punch and strike our opponent in their solar plexus with a left hammer-fist strike.
24. migi tetsui-uchi-mawashi-uchi (kiba-dachi) right inside hammer-fist strike spinning 180° anti-clockwise: the third example illustrates spinning towards our opponent to place our right foot behind our opponent's legs and administer a right arm 'clothes-line' take-down, in response to a left wrist grab.
25. hidari tate-shuto-uke (hanmi) vertical knife-hand block turning 45° anti-clockwise: the sequence of moves (25–30) is a variant of the sequences (12–16) and (17–21) where the initial choke is replaced by pushing the opponent's face to one side to distract and/or destabilise them.
26. migi gyaku-zuki (zenkutsu-dachi)
27. hidari oizuki (zenkutsu-dachi)
28. migi maegeri (zenkutsu-dachi)
29. migi gyaku-zuki (zenkutsu-dachi)
30. kosa-uke (zenkutsu-dachi)
31. kosa-uke (kiba-dachi) spinning 135° anti-clockwise: this move is a reversal technique for use if the opponent attempts to spin away out of the previous lock-up technique (30); we reverse the roles of our hands and turn him in the opposite direction, dropping him into the space we have created by stepping backwards and settling into a low stance.

32. hidari gedan-uke (kiba-dachi): we now wrap the opponent's shoulder / upper left arm by moving our right arm over the top of his shoulder towards us and downwards.
33. ryote uchi-uke (kiba-dachi): if the opponent manages to extract their arm from the wrap, we snake our left arm behind their head and under their right armpit - this move pushes their head down and forwards towards our chest; we also re-feed our right arm under their left armpit to secure a double shoulder lock.
34. migi jodan choku-zuki (kiba-dachi): if the opponent manages to get out of the double shoulder lock in (33), finish them off with punches to their throat/chin...
35. hidari chudan choku-zuki (kiba-dachi) [KIAI]... and then to their solar plexus.
36. jodan tsutsumi ken (heisoku-dachi) [YAME]: see (0)

### **Additional Resources**

John Burke's videos and Youtube clips on applications of Ji'in, Jion and Jitte are useful resources.

### **Final Thoughts**

Unlike Jion and Jitte, whose enbusens travel forwards from the starting point and return to it twice, Ji'in makes only one such excursion, leading to the possibility that it may be incomplete. Its particular focuses are the repeated use of kosa-uke (five times in all) and the four spinning turns, which can be seen as developments of techniques first learned Heian Sandan.

Although not so popular with many karateka today, I have found Ji'in to be a rewarding kata which deserves to be better known and studied.

### **Acknowledgements**

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