KATA TENSHO

Ancient Form to Modern-Day Application
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LIN shixian
?

BAIHE QUAN
(White Crane)

PAN yuba
?

BAIHE QUAN
(White Crane)

XIE zongxiang aka RURYU KO
1852–1930
MINGHE QUAN
(Whooping Crane)

HIGAONNA kanryo aka HIGASHIONNA kanryo
1853 – 1916
NAHATE

MIYAGI chojun
1888–1953
GOJU RYU

YAMAGUCHI gogen
1909–1989
ZEN NIHON KARATEDO GOJU KAI

ROWEN chris
1954–
BUNBUKAN NIHON GOJU RYU KARATE-DO
INTRODUCTION

What is ‘kata’? In the Japanese language this word means form, and in the martial arts specifically this refers to a series of pre-arranged defensive or offensive movements that one can practise by oneself, in which the essence of the art can be realised. In ancient times, dangerous techniques were hidden or incorporated into a kata as a teaching method and as a way of preserving the art.

This book is an introduction to the kata known as Tensho and is for everyone, regardless of style, grade or experience. The chapters are divided in a logical, progressive and modular fashion with instructions on one page and the corresponding pictures opposite in order to demonstrate each movement or technique.

This is the first time ever that a book and DVD has been exclusively produced on the Goju-Ryu kata Tensho. Tensho, which literally means ‘turning hands’, is one of the two main katas of the Goju-Ryu (‘go’ means hard, ‘ju’ means soft, ‘ryu’ means stream or school) of karate-do. Goju-Ryu itself is one of the four major styles of karate-do (meaning ‘way of the empty hand’). In this book, I wish to show the history of this form; from its origins in the fifteenth century, when numerous influences began helping to shape its genesis, to the finished generic form of Tensho.

An ancient martial art known as White Crane, combined with Monk Fist boxing and supported by Nahate, became Goju-Ryu. The same influences affected the development of Kata Tensho from its earlier incarnation as the Chinese form Rokkishu (‘six hands’). Legendary practitioners of the art such as Fang Qiniang (daughter of the famous Fang Zhonggong, from the Yongchun countryside in China) are noted for understanding the principles of yielding to and the diversion of power.

I also wish to illustrate the practical concepts of hard (go) and soft (ju) and the interaction of the two. To do so I will need to call on the expertise of karate masters past and present. The Okinawan karate master Kanryo Higaonna (1853–1916) brought elements of the kata from China to Okinawa, where his student, the great master Miyagi Chojun (1888–1953), developed it further, naming it Tensho. This
development was then continued by leading experts such as Grandmaster Hanshi Yamaguchi Gogen.

It is the beauty and versatility of this kata that makes it so special. It can be appreciated through the gracefulness of its movement practised slowly and with rhythmic breathing (which has clear health benefits). Its apparently effortless circular movements can redirect and nullify aggressive acts with seemingly minimum effort. In addition, there is the philosophical and humanitarian aspect within the form, and various masters emphasise its importance for moral character and good judgement. Finally, it includes a devastating striking power that, used as a last resort, is unquestionably effective.

By following this book my objective is that you will become proficient in a highly respected martial art, as the chapters lead you step by step in its mastery. As the book’s subtitle suggests, the chapters will take you from Kata Tensho’s ancient beginnings, starting with the ever-important lesson on ‘Etiquette’ (historically regarded as the beginning and end of martial arts), through the chapters on ‘Standing Basics’ and ‘Blocks’. Chapter Five is then dedicated to the kata itself in its entirety. Towards the end of the book you will be able to put the new skills into practice and learn how Kata Tensho may be deployed in the modern day.

This is one version of Kata Tensho which includes all the basic components. It is a humble, genuine attempt in a small, imperfect way to share the knowledge of this martial art. I hope you enjoy learning about it as much as I enjoy sharing it.

Shihan C. J. Rowen
I am so glad that Chris Rowen has decided to write this book. Along with many other senior karate practitioners, I love Kata Tensho. I was first taught the form by Chris some twenty years ago in his traditional dojo on the top floor of the East West Centre in London. Chris had trained with the late Grandmaster Yamaguchi Gogen in Japan, immersing himself fully in the training, culture and spirit of the Honbu dojo for three years; learning the Japanese language, becoming a Shinto priest, a Shiatsu healer and third dan grade Goju Kai karateka at the same time.

Over those twenty years we have remained firm friends. When I was Chairman of the Governing Body for Karate, Chris was the Secretary and we used his dojo as the office and had many happy hours training there. It was also the location for my first video shoot. Chris visited me many times and when I opened my full-time traditional dojo twelve years ago, Chris consecrated my Shinto shrine and taught me to maintain it properly, visiting it annually for a blessing. He has taught on many of my courses and is a popular instructor.

Chris is a quiet and private man. His spiritual life is integrated into everything he does, so he’s not given to promoting himself or demonstrating his amazing martial skill. I have spent years persuading him to pass his knowledge on in a wider sphere for the benefit of the arts. That’s why I’m glad to see this book and accompanying DVD, as it lays down the definitive version of the kata for posterity.

Tensho is a beautiful, powerful, adaptable and traditional kata. Since learning it from Chris, I studied the Chinese version, which teaches the ‘five animal hands’ from Nathan Johnson and have discussed it widely with great martial practitioners such as Steve Arniel, ninth dan exponent of the powerful Kyokushinkai style of karate, and the legendary ‘Samurai on the Door’ street knockout specialist Dennis Jones – both claim it is a favourite form.

Although I practise the Wado Ryu style of karate, I incorporated both Sanchin and Kata Tensho into my syllabus after I learned it from Chris – Sanchin to provide the internal system of the martial
arts and Tensho to transmit the power and skills learned from Sanchin for a wide variety of uses to include escaping, grappling, striking, locking, blocking and dislocation.

Chris has certainly had an influence on my karate and dojo life. His knowledge of Goju karate – its history, ethos, forms, techniques and their application – is, in my opinion, unsurpassable. This book is a must for any serious martial arts practitioner.

Steve Rowe
Chairman of Shikon Martial Art International, seventh dan
KEY POINTS

FIRST PRACTISE SLOWLY AND GET THE FEEL OF THE TECHNIQUE

BREATHE WITH EACH MOVEMENT

ALWAYS PRACTISE DILIGENTLY

STRENGTH FADES; TECHNIQUE REMAINS

DO NO HARM

WORK WITH PARTNER
Tate-Rei
(standing bow)
REI-SHIKI
(Etiquette)

In the martial arts the development of the whole person is just as important, if not more so, than the development of one’s physical and technical prowess. The practice of etiquette has long been held in high regard. An Okinawan master once wrote that ‘karate begins and ends with etiquette’. In other words, without proper etiquette there is no karate. Etiquette is like karate-do; it is something that is not of any one style, but universal to all styles.

But what is karate etiquette?

The dictionary defines etiquette as a ‘form of ceremony or decorum; the conventional code of conduct observed between members of the same profession’. Etiquette is therefore simply a sign of respect; from student to teacher, teacher to student, practitioner to dojo, and dojo to the art itself. This respect should be a permanent trait throughout your karate and in your everyday life.

A karate dojo is one of the few places in the world where people of various backgrounds can come together and try to improve together. For this reason we need etiquette; for both respect and safety. Etiquette is, after all, a built-in safety measure; if we have no respect for others, how can we have respect for ourselves? A lack of respect for your opponent can quite easily result in an accident.

The dojo is the training hall, or more accurately put, the dojo is the place (jo) where one seeks the way (do) to personal achievement through the martial arts.
KATA TENSHO

**R1: REI (Standing Bow)**
Musubi Dachi – heels together and feet at 45 degrees. Knees bent, back straight and hands at the side of the body. Bow from the waist then return to upright position.

**R2: DOWN ONTO LEFT KNEE**
Step back with left leg and go down onto the left knee. (Note the foot position: on the ball of the foot.)

**R3: DOWN ONTO BOTH KNEES**
The right leg follows the same procedure. Feet are placed flat prior to Seiza.

**R4: SEIZA (Sit)**
Sit in Seiza with the back straight. (Note the position of the feet.) Hands resting on the thighs.
REI-SHIKI

R1 Rei

R2 Down onto left knee

R3 Down onto both knees

R4 Seiza
KATA TENSHO

R5: BOW
Place left hand then right hand on the floor and bow. Return to Seiza with the back straight, returning hands onto the thighs – first the right hand and then the left. Repeat the procedure three times.

R6: SEIZA
Return to Seiza. Keep the back straight and the hands resting on the thighs.

R7: PRIOR TO STANDING
Place the right foot forward, keeping on the ball of the foot. Stand up, bringing the right foot back to join the left, and move the heels together in Musabi Dachi (formal stance). Hands are at the side of the body.

R8: BOW AND FORMAL STANCE
Bow from the waist then return to the upright position.
REI-SHIKI

R5 Bow

R6 Seiza

R7 Prior to standing

R8 Bow and formal stance
Koken
(wrist block/strike)
Kihon is the foundation on which we build our technique. Quite simply if the foundation is weak the technique will not stand. These basic positions should be practised slowly and diligently to begin with.

The hand positions are extremely important. There are two categories of hand position: ‘Kaishu’, which means open hand, of which figure K1 is an example; and ‘Heishu’, which means closed hand or fist, of which figure K2 is one example.

Practise first while standing still to familiarise yourself with the position, later progressing to movement.

Note: Koken means to block or strike with the back of a bent wrist in a vertical direction. Seiken means fist.