

Just before Seikichi Toguchi's death in August 1998, I made the last of many visits with the 80-year-old head of the shorei-kan style of Okinawan goju-ryu karate. Together with my instructor, eighth-degree black belt Toshio Tamano, we spent countless hours discussing goju-ryu, including the applications buried within the art's koryu kata (classical forms). This article will examine the applications of the movements contained in a shorei-kan kata called saifa. They have been put into a form called bunkai kumite, which uses two-man sequences to practice the hidden applications of the techniques. Toguchi concealed many such techniques in his teachings on kiso kumite (prearranged sparring designed to explore the art's hidden applications), and Tamano, his top student, continued that methodology by creating several forms of jissen kumite (combat sparring).

—S.L.

Seikichi Toguchi was one of Chojun Miyagi's senior students. Miyagi and Seiko Higa passed to him the theories

The saifa kata of shorei-kan contains many hidden applications that are taught in the art's bunkai. To demonstrate one, Scott Lenzi (left) blocks laterally with his left palm (near right), then steps forward and counters with a right elbow to the opponent's ribs (far right).

CONCEALED TECHNIQUES OF THE SAIFA KATA OF OKINAWAN GOJU-RYU by Scott Lenzi



HIDDEN TREASURE

of *kaisai no genri*, or the guidelines the ancient people used to stylize their combat-proven techniques into solo forms. Utilizing the theories of *kaisai* and his experiences in traditional Okinawan challenge matches aimed at proving the superiority of one art over another, Toguchi created the unique curriculum of *shorei-kan goju-ryu* karate. Because he was forced to participate in such matches so frequently, he was afforded the opportunity to test the techniques and applications he uncovered in his research.

Toguchi created *shorei-kan* so these applications of *kaisai* could be preserved in a progressive, systematized manner—which was the dream of *goju-ryu* founder Miyagi. The system includes a two-man application of the kata called *bunkai kumite*, as well as *kiso kumite*, which emphasizes the use of blocking techniques with a single counterattack taken from a *koryu* kata. Of all the schools of Okinawan *goju-ryu*, only *shorei-kan* has this type of *bunkai kumite* for classical kata. Toguchi was the only one of Miyagi's students to create them by following the theories of *kaisai*.

Saifa Form

Saifa is the first of eight classical kata taught in *shorei-kan*, and its *bunkai kumite* is learned at the level of first-degree black belt. The *bunkai* often cannot be performed properly or

even appreciated until years of practicing have passed. *Saifa* contains a number of useful principles and techniques which are explored in Toguchi's *bunkai kumite*. They include evasive footwork, joint-breaking techniques, trapping, centerline-theory movements, kicking techniques, body shifting, low-attack countering, single-arm blocking and striking, body rotation for power and grabbing.

The *bunkai kumite* is one method to transmit *kaisai*, but because it generally follows the sequence of the kata, only a single level of application can be explored. This article will look at several *kaisai* in the *bunkai* and show some that are not contained therein.

The principle of *tai sabaki* (body movement) occurs throughout the kata and *bunkai*. In the opening movements of the form, you move your open left hand across your body to cover your right hand, which is vertically chambered. This is executed while you move forward at a 45-degree angle. Your left (rear) foot is drawn to the right, and your body is pivoted to the left—at which point your right arm executes an elbow strike.

This initial sequence has a variety of viable *kaisai*. In the *bunkai*, Toguchi utilized the ones that demonstrate several principles and techniques, including *tai sabaki*, joint striking and elbow strikes. As the attacker moves in with a right-hand chest punch, the *kaisai*

of the first kata movement—a lateral palm block—becomes apparent, but it is also a strike to the elbow of the attacking arm. The movement of your body is off the centerline of the attack, thus enabling you to evade the blow and put yourself in the proper position to execute the elbow strike. Immediately after executing this block/strike, you move forward to attack the floating ribs with an elbow strike.

Because the original battle-proven techniques were intended to be kept secret, *kaisai* can be difficult to recognize. It is obvious from just the first few movements of the above-mentioned kata/*bunkai* that the applications are not readily apparent. However, they are effective and they do work.

The same movement yields still another viable application, one not explored within the confines of *bunkai kumite*. As the opponent moves forward to attack, you move forward simultaneously and execute a downward pushing block, followed by an elbow strike. Here, the principle of *tai sabaki* differs in that you actually move toward the attacking hand and are in position to strike without stepping.

Discover the Hidden Movements

In a subsequent section of the kata, you look to the right and move your body to the left. At the same time, your

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SCOTT LENZI

Shorei-kan instructor Scott Lenzi (left) and his partner demonstrate a single-arm combat application not explored in the *saifa* form. When the partner punches, Lenzi uses his left arm to block (1). He then lifts the attacking arm above his head (2) before slamming his left fist down onto his partner's head (3).



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To illustrate another hidden technique of goju-ryu's saifa kata, Scott Lenzi (left) executes a circular block in response to a punch (1). He then swings his arm counterclockwise (2) and traps the punching arm in his armpit (3). Lenzi finishes with an open-hand strike to the throat (4).



already-lowered left hand circles, then rises while your right hand executes a downward block. You then face the front and execute a front kick.

In the bunkai, Toguchi followed another theory of kaisai and kept his body in alignment with, or square to, his head. Two separate movements are involved—a downward block and a front kick—and then the following head punch is stopped with an upward palm-heel block.

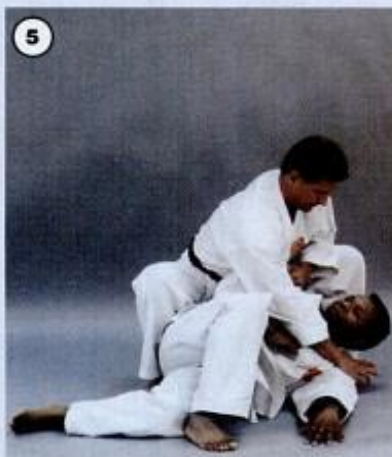
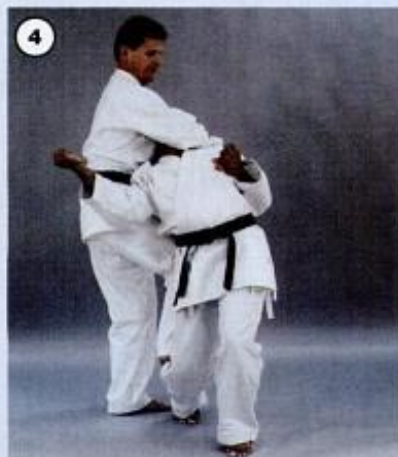
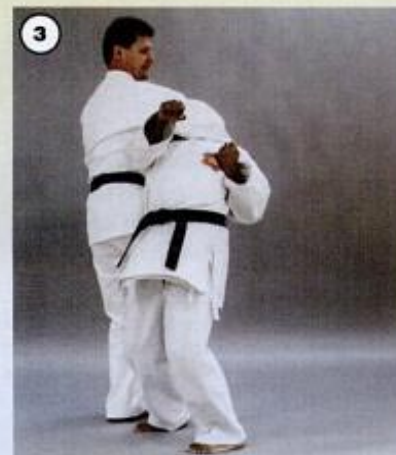
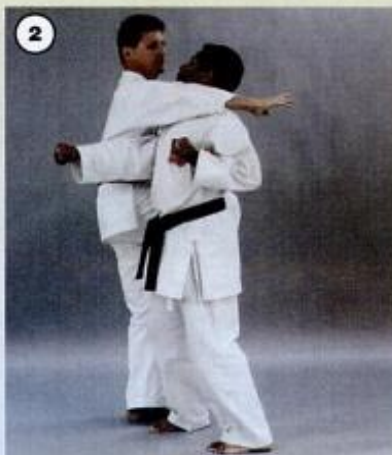
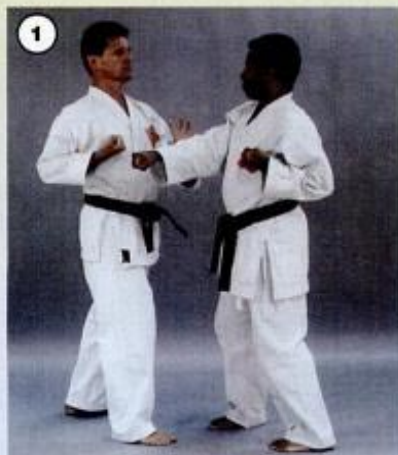
This bunkai kaisai utilizes body shifting, kicking techniques and the

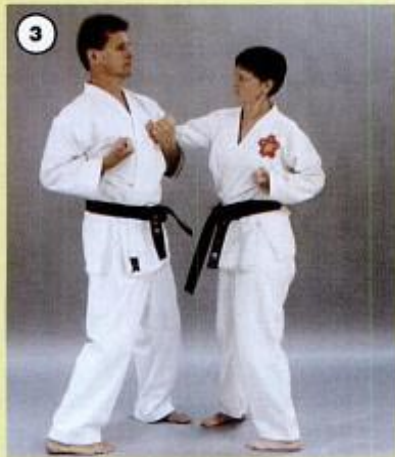
centerline theory. You remain on the centerline as the opponent attacks so you can counter-kick immediately from a cat stance. There are many instances in which it is desirable to be off the centerline of the

attack, however.

Another kaisai for this kata movement that is not shown in the bunkai incorporates both hand motions just as the attacker punches. You perform an upward palm-heel block with one

The end of the saifa bunkai contains some of the most effective hidden techniques of shorei-kan: Scott Lenzi (left) uses his left palm to block his opponent's punch (1), then steps forward and slides his right arm along the other man's neck (2). Next, Lenzi encircles his neck as he forces him backward (3). A quick stomp to the back of the knee (4) sends the opponent to the floor (5). To finish, Lenzi attacks his neck and face (6).





hand while your other hand clamps downward, thus pulling the attacker forward as you execute a front kick.

The next portion of the bunkai explores attacking and defending techniques in which both hands move simultaneously. The attacker lunges forward with a two-hand lower-knuckle strike, each of which is aimed at a target just below the collar bone. In response, you utilize a two-hand open-hand chest block. It is interesting to note that in shorei-kan, blocking tech-



niques can be used as striking techniques.

The next sequence allows you to practice a rarely seen technique: blocking and striking with the same arm. You execute an upper-level block, then swing your arm counterclockwise, effectively moving your opponent's arm out of the way. At the same time, you pivot your hips. Once you have completed that motion, you pivot back toward your opponent to strike his temple with a twisting hammerfist.

One of a Kind

Seikichi Toguchi's life was unique for several reasons:

- He directly or indirectly influenced every teacher of *goju-ryu* karate in Okinawa.
 - He created, following Chojun Miyagi's dream, a progressive system for teaching Okinawan *goju-ryu*.
 - He was the first of Miyagi's students to open a *dojo* in Tokyo and thereby accelerate the growth and popularity of the art.
 - He was the only student of Miyagi to also study in-depth with Seiko Higa.
 - He was the only senior student of Miyagi to publish English-language books about the art he loved.
- S.L.

Evaluate the Truth

It should be noted that the application of the *kaisai* found in a *kata* often does not follow the direction or

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sequence set forth in the kata. Another component of the kaisai theory teaches that you should not be misled by the directions of the techniques in a kata. Kata evolved from techniques that had been proved in combat. Toguchi pointed out that many of the countering techniques in kata are not shown in those kata and that their true study must take into account how the opponent would react in order to find a viable application.

For example, the first few movements of the saifa kata end with a strike in which the fist of the attack-

deadly and elusive kaisai. As the final attack is launched, you step into the attack (off the centerline) while simultaneously executing a downward pushing block. The still forward-moving opponent is then brought into range for an inside-arm strike and simultaneous side kick. The synergy of these movements creates a soft yet devastating counter-attack.

Path to Mastery

Various experts have pointed out that it is relatively easy to learn the sequences of offensive and defensive

Highest Praise

Toshio Tamano, Toguchi's most senior student and successor, relates some interesting aspects of Toguchi's training:

When Chojun Miyagi and Seiko Higa taught, questions were not permitted during class. They were so strict that no new *kata* would be taught to a student until his performance of the *kata* he was currently learning was deemed adequate. The highest praise that was ever offered by either of them was that the student had maintained the techniques and principles of the *kata*. To this day, that remains one of the highest compliments given in karate.

—S.L.

ing elbow is held tightly by the other hand. Because it provides no additional striking power or balance, many practitioners wonder why it is included. If you study *kata* according to the precepts of kaisai, you must evaluate what your opponent would do if you were to execute a particular technique. One possible scenario is shown with the inward elbow block. But the need to hold the fist is still not apparent. Utilizing a kaisai hidden in a different *kata*, you now move in a way designed to break the elbow or at least twist it upward to put the attacker in a precarious position. You would then discover that if your opponent held his fist as taught in the *kata*, he would thwart your attempted arm twist. This illustrates how well the masters hid their combat techniques and principles.

The end of the saifa bunkai contains one of the most dynamic,

movements that make up *kata*. However, only by studying how a particular *kata* evolved will you truly understand the meaning of the hidden techniques. Of all Miyagi's students, only one taught karate full time, and only one studied and developed a complete system to teach all those concealed techniques. His name was Seikichi Toguchi. ✘

About the author: Scott Lenzi is the United States representative for the shorei-kan style of Okinawan goju-ryu karate, which is now headed by Toshio Tamano. Prior to Seikichi Toguchi's death, Lenzi collaborated with him on Okinawan Goju-Ryu II: Advanced Techniques of Shorei-Kan Karate. Toguchi also penned Okinawan Goju-Ryu: Fundamentals of Shorei-Kan Karate. Both are available from Ohara Publications, (800) 396-4272.