

Four Characteristics of Okinawa Goju Ryu

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Okinawa Goju Ryu is a fighting art with a unique heritage in that it has absorbed the characteristics of two cultures Chinese and Okinawa. The environment it was created in was a trading culture, which looked to the outside world for economic survival and cultural adaptation. Being a trading center Naha village was a transit port for goods coming from the South Seas and China going to Japan. With trade came the exchange of ideas and opportunities to train in martial arts from the outside world.

This thesis will discuss four characteristics particular to Okinawa Goju Ryu.

1. Muchimi - ムチミ - Heavy Sticky

In Hogan, Muchimi literally refers to sticky rice that can be pounded into a sticky paste. It is dense and heavy. When touched it sticks to you, and when you pull away it sticks to you. In Goju Ryu karate, Muchimi refers to the heavy sticky movements used for blocking (e.g. Hiki Uke 引き受け pulling block) and attacking (e.g. Furi Geri 振り蹴り Swing Kick), and to the notion that you stay close to your opponent in blocking or attacking. Developed thru Kata (型) forms training and Kakie (カキエ) sticky hand training also thought as Chinese push hands (T'ui shou 推手) which was brought from Southern China. Muchimi is developed thru Kakie training. By constant contact with a partner one learns to feel/listen to your partners movements through body contact. One can know whether a person is relaxed or tense; balanced or not; posture is correct or not; and rooted or not. You learn to feel a person's intention through physical contact. The practice of Kakie can be done stationary or with movement. Suri ashi practice you learn how to 'stick' with a person in motion.

Kata, Sanchin (三戦) and Tensho (転掌), help further along the development of Muchimi. The tensing muscles and physical contact in the Kata Sanchin for example lead to internal development and physical awareness. The Kata is done with a heavy sticky feeling and because of the slow deliberate movements the student feels inward and becomes aware of posture.

While applying techniques one has to remain in contact with your partner as breaks in physical contact will often lead to failure in applying a technique and counter attack. Through regular Kakie and Sanchin training a greater understanding of this concept will be developed.

2. Chiru no Chan Chan - チルノチャンチャン - Fast "springy" movement.

The body's muscles are as strong as steel, yet flexible in this condition. The feeling is cat-like. The best example of this is seen in Kururunfa (久留頓破) when dropping into Koshi Dachi

(腰立ち) and then immediately spring up into Zenkutsu Dachi (前屈立ち). Development of fast springy movement is necessary to develop strong suri ashi and agility as seen in the practice of Sayu footwork in cat stance. Kongo Ken is used to develop the particular muscles especially when doing two handed overhead thrusts. Ten Tsuki helps to develop the coiling and releasing training for the muscles to develop Chiru no Chan Chan. By dropping and rising quickly during the exercise one learns how to control muscles by releasing and contracting quickly. This also leads to a fast 'springy' movement. In Sanchin Kata, one develops control over Tanden (丹田) strong contraction of the muscles in the lower abdominal region which leads to explosive control in this area.

By being able to physically change from one height to another or moving in one direction to another by coiling up and storing energy in muscles to create an explosive cat-like movements is what makes the characteristic of Chiru no Chan Chan.

3. Chin Kuchi Kakin - チンクチカキン - Instantaneous tightening of the joints to focus a technique.

This is used to describe the stabilization of the body for a solid position by locking the joints in the body (ankles knees and hips) and gripping the floor with the toes ankles, knees and hips, and by gripping the floor with your toes. Chin Kuchi is the concentration or focus of strength and power, by the simultaneous contraction of the muscles in the body at the point of impact that brings karate techniques from a fluid, relaxed state designed for speed, to a solid, tense state that is designed for strength. The process of "whipping" out a technique, tensing upon impact, and then immediately relaxing again allows a practitioner to achieve maximum power while exerting minimal energy. As well, Chin Kuchi Kakin is the positioning of the body where, when combined, the muscular and skeletal alignment is at its strongest. That is, alignment of the Body is made from the feet, to the knees, to the waist (lower spine), to the shoulders, to the elbows, to the wrist, to the weapon – that is the "snap of the whip."

This is one of the hardest concepts to grasp in Goju Ryu Keiko. That is, which muscles to use when doing a Tsuki as the best example, it is important to realise that this is where the term Go Ju will make itself clear. As it is necessary to tighten (Go) your joints to get the mass of your arm moving then you must totally relax (Ju) your body and use physics, in other words momentum. At the point of impact, you must then tighten all your body joints and have correct spinal alignment to get the most out of your punch.

There are many training practices in the Goju Ryu repertoire but the best examples are Sanchin Kata and Makiwara (巻藁 Striking Post). On the Makiwara, you practice to achieve Chin Kuchi Kakin. The post allows you to develop the correct posturing; tightening and relaxing; and then tightening on impact and releasing immediately.

Sanchin compliments Makiwara by training the body to tense all the muscles and align the spine in straight stack. Learning how to control all the muscles in your body is developed in Sanchin and then focused thru Makiwara.

4. Muchi mitai Ni - 鞭みたいに - Like a whip

Whip-like movements in Okinawa Goju are Furitsuki and Furigeri for example. However, this characteristic of Goju Ryu is also seen in Tsuki waza such as Chuden Zuki. As apart of Chin Kuchi Kakin when the fist is reaches it's maximum and/or makes impact, the tightening and release create a snap. What is important to understand 'like a whip' or another example is the elastic string of a paddleball, the muscles are relaxed and tighten only when reaching the target. While the end of the whip travels, the lash remains relaxed until it reaches full length. Then it tenses before returning to a relax state.

These four characteristics clearly distinguish Okinawa Goju Ryu and make it a unique art. The training to acquire all four characteristics to a maximum degree is very difficult. Only a few students have the determination and the resources to achieve the four. However, this should not deter anyone from trying. Regular training in Hojo Undo; Junbi Undo; Makiwara; and Sanchin Kata will help a student potentially to reach the goal of developing the above characteristics of Okinawa Goju Ryu.