

Seiunchin

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Master Tatsuo Shimabuku learned this kata from Master Chojun Miyagi sometime around 1936. Seiunchin kata seems to have been developed in China and brought to Okinawa in the late 1800's by the founder of Naha-te, Kanryo Higaonna. Higaonna Sensei is said to have learned it under the legendary Chinese master Xie Zhong Xiang (known on Okinawa as Ryu Ru Ko), or perhaps under Xiang sifu's assistant, Wai Xin Xian, who is also said to have taught at the old Kojo dojo at Fuzhou City in Fujian Province.

Ryu Ru Ko (Xie Zhong Xiang) was himself a student of another great Chinese master Pan Yu Ba. He was also a renowned master of White Crane boxing, but some researchers suggest that Seiunchin kata is not included within that style, hinting that Higaonna must have either learned it elsewhere or developed it himself. However, the founder of Ryuei-ryu, Nakaima Norisato, is also believed to have learned Seiunchin kata under Ryu Ru Ko.

Be that as it may, Ryu Ru Ko had many students of note: Kanryo Higaonna, Chen Shih Ting and Master Huang Sheng Shyan (who passed away in 1992), to name a few. The art taught by Ryu Ru Ko contains four elements: the *Whooping Crane*; the *Flying Crane*; the *Eating Crane*; and the *Sleeping Crane*. Together they comprise the Fujian White Crane boxing system. The White Crane boxing system consists of four sets:

Pah Pu Lian

Lohan (Monk Fist or sometimes called Quick Fist)

Hua Pah Pu

Chung Chien (Seiunchin or Central Frame)

It also includes the eight principles of swallowing, spitting, floating, sinking, springing, lifting, bursting, and rebounding. Seiunchin kata as we know it is similar in movements and structure to the Chung Chien set.

Another important theory comes from Dr. Yang Jwing-Ming who states that Seiunchin was originally an independent form known as "Hu He Shuang Xing Quan" also known as Shuang Xing or "Tiger Crane Double Shapes Fist". This form was

created by Master Lin Shi-Rong, from the Ping County, South Sea in the early 1900's. Master Lin was the author of the book *Hu He Shuang Xing Quan*. This particular form (quan or kata) mixes the techniques and characteristics of the Tiger Claw, which is hard, and the techniques from the Crane, which are soft, to become a very effective and popular southern style practice sequence. However, there is only this single form, not a style.

Kinjo Akio says that his research has revealed to him that Seiunchin may be from a Hawk style of Chinese boxing, and mean "Blue-Hawk-Fight," which is pronounced Qing Ying Zhan in Mandarin, or Chai In Chin in Fujian dialect. Another theory yet still is that Chojun Miyagi (student of Higaonna and founder of Gojuryu) may have been responsible for creating this form himself, or perhaps introduced it from other sources.

Finally, there are ambiguous records that Seiunchin was introduced when the "Thirty-Six Families" arrived in Okinawa in 1393, at the Chinese settlement of Kumemura, Okinawa. Many Chinese masters visited or lived in this area near Naha village. They influenced the development of karate through the years with many relationships with notable Okinawan masters. Some of these notable relationships much later on were Tong Gee Hsiang with Choki Motobu and Gokenki with Chojun Miyagi. Most historians tend to agree that Seiunchin's origins do lie in the internal system of the White Crane. Among all the martial arts developed in South China, Fujian White Crane is one of the most unique and complete traditional systems.

Otsuka Tadahiko, a Gojuryu teacher who has spent considerable time in China and Taiwan researching the roots of his system, tells us that his research indicates the name Seiunchin may mean "Follow-Move-Power," which would be pronounced Sui Yun Jin in Mandarin Chinese. A breakdown would be as follows:

Sei (*Zui* in Japanese) is "Sui," or to follow

Un (*Un* in Japanese) is "Yun," meaning to move

Chin (*Kei* in Japanese) is "Jing" or "Jin" (power)

In other words, Seiunchin is a kata for developing power while moving according to the circumstances. However, the kanji for Seiunchin as translated by many other Okinawa Gojuryu stylists such as Miyazato Eiichi and Morio Higaonna, as well as Isshinryu's Angi Uezu (son-in-law of Tatsuo Shimabuku) reads as such:

Sei is “Zhi” (control) - Jpn. “Sei”

Un is “Yin” (pull) – Jpn. “In”

Chin is “Zhan” (fight) – Jpn. “Sen.”

Thus, "Control, Pull, Fight" is perhaps hinting at the various grappling and grabbing techniques contained within. Two examples are the "reinforced block" which can be applied as a wrist-crushing joint lock, and the "archers block," which can be used as a throw.

According to Meitoku Yagi, Kenwa Mabuni, and Yoshiyuki Uematsu, the kanji for Seiunchin (or Seienchin) says:

Sei is “Zheng” (control) - Jpn. “Sei”

En is “Yuan” (far away) – Jpn. “En”

Chin is “Zhen” (suppress) – Jpn. “Chin.”

These names are all concepts based on the modern translations of the literal kanji. As you can see, there are more than one way that the kanji may be translated, but they all seem to have some merit. The actual original meaning appears to have been lost to time, but it is fascinating to note that many of the Chinese based systems that utilize some variations of this form consider it to be a military exercise as opposed to a civilian based, self-protection method.

Classified as a “Kaishugata” because most of the techniques in the older forms of this kata use open hands, Seiunchin kata concentrates on the shiko forms of this kata use open hands, Seiunchin kata concentrates on the shiko dachi, or as it is called in Isshinryu, soto hachiji dachi (Seiunchin stance), as a method of stabilizing and generation great power in a short distance. While mobility in a battle is a must, so is stability; especially in hand-to- hand, close combat situations, where battle-field conditions may not be in your favor.

Seiunchin has often been transliterated as the “war kata” or “to walk far to quell or conqueror.” Indeed, while this may not be a literal translation of the name, it does get the idea of the purpose of the kata across perfectly – and that is a reference to war and battle-field tactics. In this school of thought, some oral traditions suggests that both the open and closed hand movements inherent in the kata may be symbolic of the use of

short range, bladed weapons. If one visualizes a short blade in one or both hands, it is not difficult to see the reasoning, or the connection.

Whether utilizing weapons or empty hand (or both), all of this does seem to suggest close quarter combat strategies designed for the battlefield. Look at the kata and consider:

- 1) The emphasis on low stances and circular stepping patterns.
- 2) Both linear and circular hand and arm movements which are compatible with advanced hand grappling and joint locking techniques (tori-te) and/or possible slashing/stabbing methods with bladed weapons.
- 3) The complete lack of kicking techniques, but the advanced use of leg attacks (or as the Chinese refer to it, leg maneuvers – techniques which are designed to unbalance, lock, step on or in some way attack an opponent's leg or foot).
- 4) Close-in techniques such as uppercuts and elbow strikes, also pulling in and fingertip (or bladed) stabbing techniques.
- 5) Deep breathing methods which are essential for intense and prolonged battle-field engagements. (i.e., carrying and utilizing equipment / weapons, overcoming fear and stress responses, overcoming physical fatigue, and the ability to overcome a stronger opponent utilizing power rather than strength.)

On the subject of breathing as it relates to Seiunchin, there is a popular belief that Seiunchin kata should only be performed fast and alive, without any emphasis on deep breathing or dynamic tension at all. While it is true that the goal in most kata is to remove all unnecessary tension, thereby that the goal in most kata is to remove all unnecessary tension, thereby making movements as free and powerful as possible, controlled breathing and tension in its proper applications is essential.

The idea of using tension could have been institutionalized by Chojun Miyagi's obsession with development of a strong body. His knowledge of the methods of developing internal ki (or qigong) used by the Chinese originators of Seiunchin kata, may or may not have been somewhat limited. His feats of being struck while performing both Seiunchin and Sanchin kata may have been interpreted as developing "muscular control" instead of placing the emphasis on developing internal energy through the proper use of breathing methods.

In Seiunchin kata, the power must be balanced between hard and soft. Breathing, tension and intent, are the keys. One must never use brute force. During the execution of Seiunchin techniques one must issue hard energy first followed by softness immediately, or in some instances, the reverse – soft movement followed by a violent, explosive movement at the end. This must first be directed by the mind (intent).

In addition, one must also remember that almost all of the Seiunchin techniques are related to the mutual angle between you and your opponent. If we look at this from a grappling perspective, when you set up an angle for joint locking (for instance), if your opponent is experienced, he/she can sense it and change the angle you have set up. Therefore, in the proper execution of Seiunchin, the energy is sunken and stable; the power always follows a circular, reeling path without the slightest break. Power is rounded and alive, never following along a simple straight path. The two hands coordinate as a lever with both vertical and horizontal power that follows a spiral path.

The power comes from the whole body; up, down, right, and left, all containing stored energy. This energy moves in continuous cycles, without imbalance, complete and alive. Only when the opponent is wrapped up and the power is applied suddenly and crisply can locking the joints reach its maximum efficiency. Today, Seiunchin kata is preserved in many modern styles of karate-do, including Gojuryu, Shitoryu, Isshinryu, Shoreiryu, Kyokushin, Ryuei-ryu and Eizo Shimabuku's lineage of Shorinryu.