



Understanding Kata Applications

One of the unique and important aspects of the Asian martial arts is kata. The kata, or forms, are formal exercises consisting of a prearranged series of blocks and attacks performed against imaginary opponents. There are a wide variety of forms that are practiced today; some are old and some are of more recent creation. Some are performed “hard” and fast, while others are performed “soft” and slowly. There are simple forms and very complex forms, long forms and short forms, forms of nearly every conceivable movement and method. Primarily, the kata contain the techniques of a given style, presented in such a way that, when applied to an actual opponent, they become an effective way of contending with a variety of situations. A thorough knowledge of the techniques and their applications bunkai is essential to a complete understanding of the kata.

Keep in mind that the kata are a collection of moves much like a dictionary is a collection of words. A dictionary is a very handy thing to have when you need to learn a new word or reference an old one, but you can't have a conversation by merely reading the words out of the dictionary. You need to learn the words by heart, internalizing them to such a degree that you no longer have to think about the separate words anymore, but rather, they come to you as you need them to respond to a certain question or convey a particular thought. The applications of the kata act in the same way, as a primer course in self-defense. You could not fight trying to apply the moves exactly like they are presented in the kata. Rather, you need to mix and match different moves from different sequences in order to address the given situation.

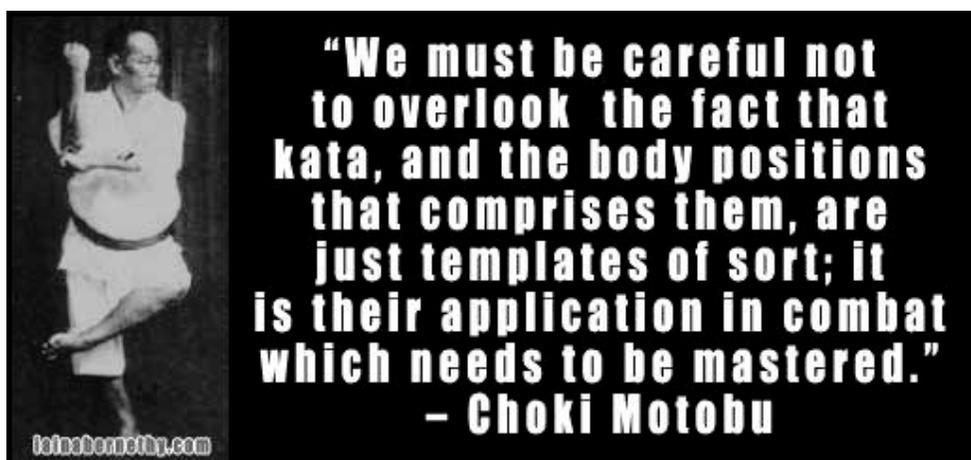
To train this, learn the various sequences described above by training them with a partner, but as you get more comfortable with the concepts and techniques that they teach you, have your opponent attack more and more realistically. Don't worry about what techniques he is going to throw, instead concentrate on reacting to what you see coming at you. With hard work you will soon find yourself less concerned about the particular attacks you think your uke should be throwing in order for you to perform a specific application, instead developing a state of mushin, or “no mind”, where you are free to react to the reality and spontaneity of the situation. Your partner can also begin to step up the speed, power, and variety of his attacks. This type of training is referred to as reality based application training.

Reality-based applications are worth far more to you in a self-defense situation than applications performed with a compliant uke. Your uke should only be compliant (i.e. not moving at top speed with good power, leaving a blocked punch out while you perform additional moves, etc.). Reality-based applications should start looking more and more like ippon kumite (one step prearranged sparring) and finally develop into kata based sparring, where the opponent comes at you with different techniques.

Although sparring gear can be worn for such practice, kata based sparring is *not* to be confused with free sparring in the point sparring sense of the word. Attackers should attack with realistic, committed attacks closer resembling a street fight or assault than a sparring match between two trained martial artists concentrating on maintaining range, feinting, etc.

Good applications need to flow and feel natural. Flowing from one technique to the next allows you opportunities to keep the initiative once you've gotten it, controlling the opponent and the outcome of the situation. If applications are too choppy, or too complex, or too unnatural, they will not be useful to you in a real situation. This fact will bear itself out as your practice evolves into kata based sparring.

An opponent is most likely to attack you with his dominant hand, which is usually the right, and more often than not he will aim at your face and head. There is also a good chance that he may try to kick you in the body with his dominant (right) leg. To a lesser extent, he may also attack with a left punch or kick. Since you can't control what your opponent will throw at you in a real situation, in order to make your applications as effective and practical as possible, you will need to apply generalized blocking principle. This is the ability to apply a single technique against a wide range of incoming attacks, and will quickly show its usefulness to you in both reality based kata applications and kata based sparring. Generalized blocking can cut down on your reaction time and make your defense more effective, which in turn can boost your confidence, giving you a psychological edge.

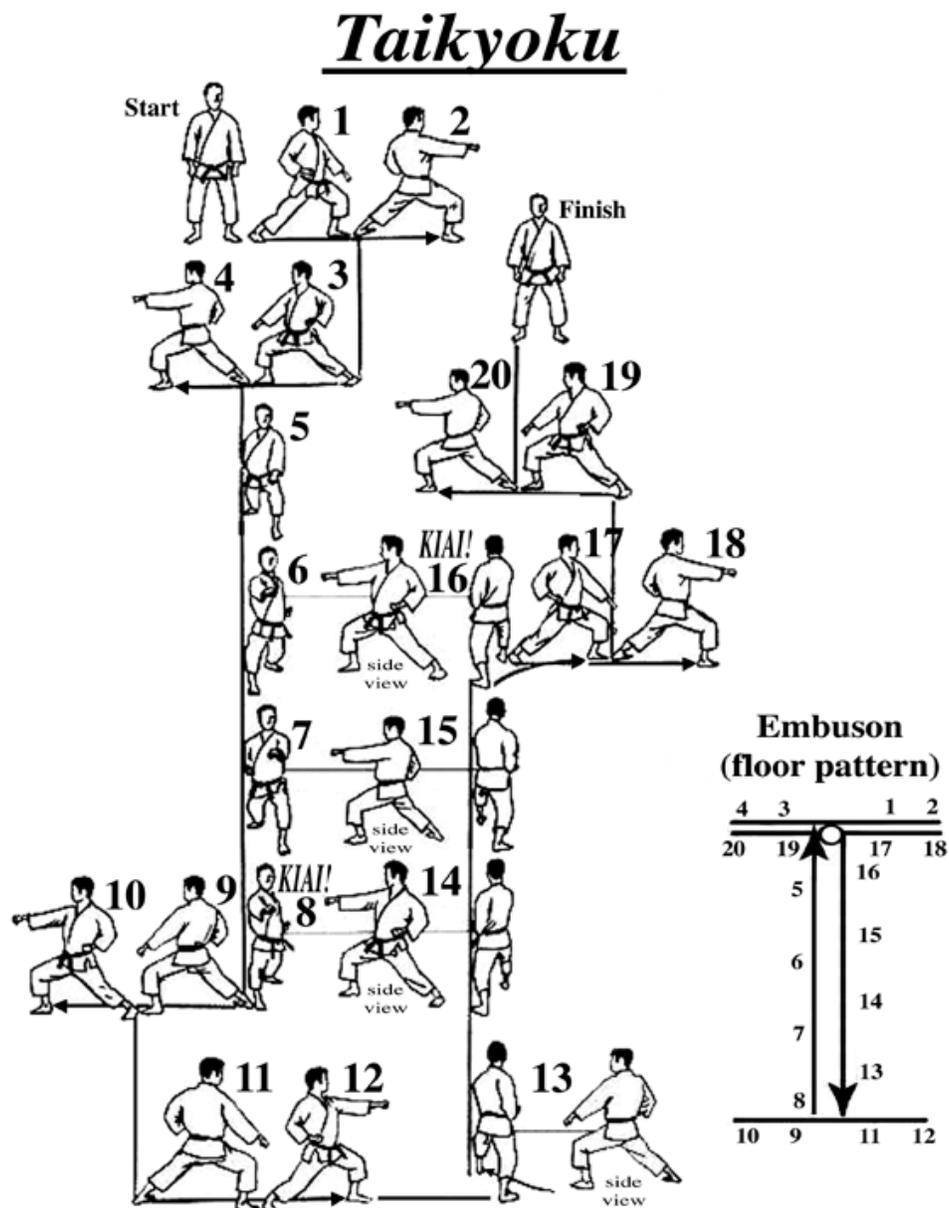


Kata 1- Taikyoku

History

The first form taught in Cuong Nhu is a kata known as Taikyoku, or First Cause. Originally a Shotokan kata created by Gichen Funakoshi, Taikyoku Shodan found its way into Cuong Nhu through O Sensei Ngo Dong's karate-do instructor, Sensei Choji Suzuki, from whom Dong learned the form in 1956, at age 19. The name originated because, upon attacking, your opponent has given you “first cause” to defend yourself, hence the reason each combination opens with a blocking technique.

“...The student who has gained proficiency in basic techniques and understands the essence of the Taikyoku Kata will appreciate the real meaning of the maxim, ‘In Karate, there is no advantage in the first attack.’” -Karate-Do Kyohan, Gichin Funakoshi, p.35



Taikyoku

(First Cause)

Stance	Action
Natural stance (north)	
Attention stance	Bow
Natural stance	
1. Turn 90° left, LFS (west)	Left lower block
2. Advance RFS	Right lunge punch
3. Turn 180° right, RFS (east)	Right lower block
4. Advance LFS	Left lunge punch
5. Turn 90° left, LFS (north)	Left lower block
6. Advance RFS	Right lunge punch
7. Advance LFS	Left lunge punch
8. Advance RFS	Right lunge punch KIAI
9. Turn 270° left, LFS (east)	Left lower block
10. Advance RFS	Right lunge punch
11. Turn 180° right, RFS (west)	Right lower block
12. Advance LFS	Left lunge punch
13. Turn 90° left, LFS (south)	Left lower block
14. Advance RFS	Right lunge punch
15. Advance LFS	Left lunge punch
16. Advance RFS	Right lunge punch KIAI
17. Turn 270° left, LFS (west)	Left lower block
18. Advance RFS	Right lunge punch
19. Turn 180° right, RFS (east)	Right lower block
20. Advance LFS	Left lunge punch
21. Turn 90° left, natural stance (north)	
Attention stance	Bow
Natural stance	

Applications

1. Moves 1 and 2 against a double hand grab: Chamber enough to cross the opponent's wrists then deliver a left lower block, striking the opponent's left arm with their right to clear the grabbing hand from your right wrist. Trap the opponent's arms across their body while simultaneously delivering a right punch to the head. Grasp the opponent and turn to your right, pivoting the opponent on his left foot to throw him with uki goshi (floating hip). Mirror image for moves 3 and 4.

2. Moves 1 and 2 against a right front kick: Double block the opponent's kicking leg with a right low parry followed by a left lower block, quickly checking the inside of the right knee with your left elbow. Step in deep enough to deliver a left hammer fist strike to the groin. Immediately grab your opponent's gi with your left hand and withdraw it forcefully (hikite) as you strike with your right punch. Employ the switch step to increase your power. Finish by grasping the opponent with your right hand and turning to your right, pivoting the opponent on his left foot to throw him with uki goshi (floating hip). Mirror image for moves 3 and 4.

3. Moves 1 and 2 against a right punch: Block with a left outer block. Deliver a simultaneous right punch to the floating rib or solar plexus. Use the left lower block to trap the opponent's right arm across their body, clearing the high line allowing you to finish with a right punch to the face. Employ the switch step to increase your power. Finish by grasping the opponent and turning to your right, pivoting the opponent on his left foot to throw him with uki goshi (floating hip).

4. Moves 5 to 8 – The Blitz Attack: Use the first half of the left lower block as an outer block to clear the centerline, either blocking an incoming attack or actively working to suppress the opponent's guard. Once cohesion has been made, use the downward motion of the second half of the block to clear the line for you to counterattack. Punching quickly as you step forward to stay in range and keep the gap between you closed. Keep the pressure on until you see an opportunity to grasp the opponent and turn to your left, pivoting the opponent on his left foot to throw him with uki goshi.

Kata 2

Cuong Nhu's Kata 2 was created by O Sensei Ngo Dong in the late 1960's to satiate his students' seemingly insatiable thirst for sparring. He created a "sparring kata" and placed it in order just after Kata 1, as the inner chop shares an almost identical chamber position as the lower block in Kata 1. The inner chop and front snap kicks of Kata 2 are reminiscent of crane style forms. Kata 2 should not be called Taikyoku 2, even though it shares the same embusen (floor pattern). Funakoshi's Taikyoku Nidan is almost identical to Taikyoku Shodan, only performed with high punches instead of middle punches. The first half of Kata 2 goes like this:

Stance	Action
Natural stance	
Attention stance	Bow
Natural stance	
1. Turn 90° left, LFS (west)	Left inner chop
2. Right kicking stance	Right front snap kick
3. Advance RFS	Consecutive punches (right and left)
4. Turn 180° right, RFS (east)	Right inner chop
5. Left kicking stance	Left front snap kick
6. Advance LFS	Consecutive punches (left and right)
7. Turn 90° left, LFS (north)	Left inner chop
8. Right kicking stance	Extend both arms then pull both fists back to ribs while executing a right front thrust kick
9. Advance RFS	Double punch
10. Left kicking stance	Extend both arms then pull both fists back to ribs while executing a left front thrust kick
11. Advance LFS	Double punch
12. Right kicking stance	Extend both arms then pull both fists back to ribs while executing a right front thrust kick
13. Advance RFS	Double punch KIAI
14. Turn 270° left, LFS (east)	Left inner chop - Repeat from move #1 above.

1. Moves 1 to 4 against a punch or kick: Block the incoming attack with a high or low chop block. When possible, double block, checking the attacking arm with your elbow while simultaneously attacking with your chop. Immediately grab the opponent and pull him into an upward knee strike or front snap kick targeting the groin with the shin. Follow-up with consecutive punches to different target levels. Grasp and pivot the opponent on his left foot to throw him with uki goshi.

2. Moves 9 to 11 against a grabbing attack: Grab the opponent's lapels and pull him into a front thrust kick aimed at the knee. Land forward, stepping behind the opponent's lead leg as you use the double punch motion to throw him backwards to the ground.

3. Moves 9 to 11 against a grab and punch: Opponent attacks by grabbing your right hand with his left hand and punches with his right hand. Your right hand grabs opponent's left wrist while your left hand deflects the punch from the inside and grabs opponent's punching arm. Pull the opponent in as you execute a right thrust kick to opponent's mid-section, groin, or knee. Land in a right forward stance with a simultaneous right high and left low double punch.

Kata 3 and 4

The next two kata are nearly identical to Taikyoku, except that the blocks are different. Kata 3 utilizes the inner middle block in place of the lower block, and Kata 4 uses the rising block. Otherwise, the footwork and other techniques are the same. Katas 3 and 4 were probably created by O Sensei Ngo Dong as no kata like them are practiced in Shotokan. Like Kata 2, Katas 3 and 4 are not technically Taikyoku forms, even though they share the same embusen (floor pattern).

Kata 3

1. Moves 1 and 2 against a punch: Double block the incoming attack using your right hand and clearing with your left inner middle block. When possible, check the attacking arm with your elbow while simultaneously attacking with a backfist to the face. Immediately grasp the opponent and pull him into a right punch. Employ the switch step to increase your power. Finish by grasping the opponent and turning to your right, pivoting the opponent on his left foot to throw him with uki goshi.

Kata 4

1. Moves 1 and 2 against a punch: Double block the incoming attack using your right hand and clearing with your left rising block. When possible, check the attacking arm with your elbow while simultaneously attacking with a hammerfist to the face. Immediately grasp the opponent and pull him into a right punch. Employ the switch step to increase your power. Finish by grasping the opponent and turning to your right, pivoting the opponent on his left foot to throw him with uki goshi. As always, simply mirror image for moves 3 and 4.

Kata 5

Combination Kata (Machine Gun Kata)

Modified kata takes the pattern from the kata, but changes, or modifies, the moves. Modified kata can consist of almost anything, turning the kata into a training device with infinite possibilities. Most modified kata are created to drill specific techniques, change often, and are not written down, but one modified kata, nicknamed “Machine Gun Kata” by Grandmaster Dong, is a combination of movements and techniques from the first four forms. The blocking sequence has been expanded to incorporate all three basic blocks, one after another in quick succession. The hips play an important role in giving each block power and focus. This is followed by a front snap kick and three punches to different levels, high, middle, and low. The series down the middle of the performance line consists of three front snap kicks with the hands held in a guarded position. This concept of altering movements not normally found in the kata can be done at any time to drill a particular technique or series of techniques.

Stance	Action
Natural stance	
Attention stance Bow	
Natural stance	
1. Turn 90° left, LFS (west)	Left lower, left middle, and left rising block
2. Right kicking stance	Right front snap kick (pull hands to right hip)
3. Advance RFS	Land with right high, left middle, right low punch
4. Turn 180° right, RFS (east)	Right lower, right middle, and right rising block
5. Left kicking stance	Left front snap kick (pull hands to left hip)
6. Advance LFS	Left high, right middle, and left low punch
7. Turn 90° left, LFS (north)	Left lower, left middle, and left rising block
8. Advance RFS	Right front snap kick (hands in guarded position)
9. Advance LFS	Left front snap kick (hands in guarded position)
10. Advance RFS	Right front snap kick (hands in guarded position)
	Right high, left middle, right low punch KIAI
11. Turn 270° left, LFS (east)	Repeat from move #1 above.

1. Moves 1 to 7 against consecutive attacks: Block the first attack (probably a right punch or kick) with a left lower block. As the opponent throws a left counterpunch, double block it, using the right hand (chamber) to block the punch and momentarily catch the hand, allowing you to hyperextend or even break the opponent’s left arm with your left inner middle block against the outside of his elbow. Still grabbing with the right hand, drive your left forearm into the opponent’s neck or face. Immediately grab the opponent and pull him into an upward knee strike or front snap kick targeting the groin with the shin. Follow-up with consecutive punches to different target levels. Grasp and pivot the opponent on his left foot to throw him with uki goshi. Mirror image for moves 8 to 14.