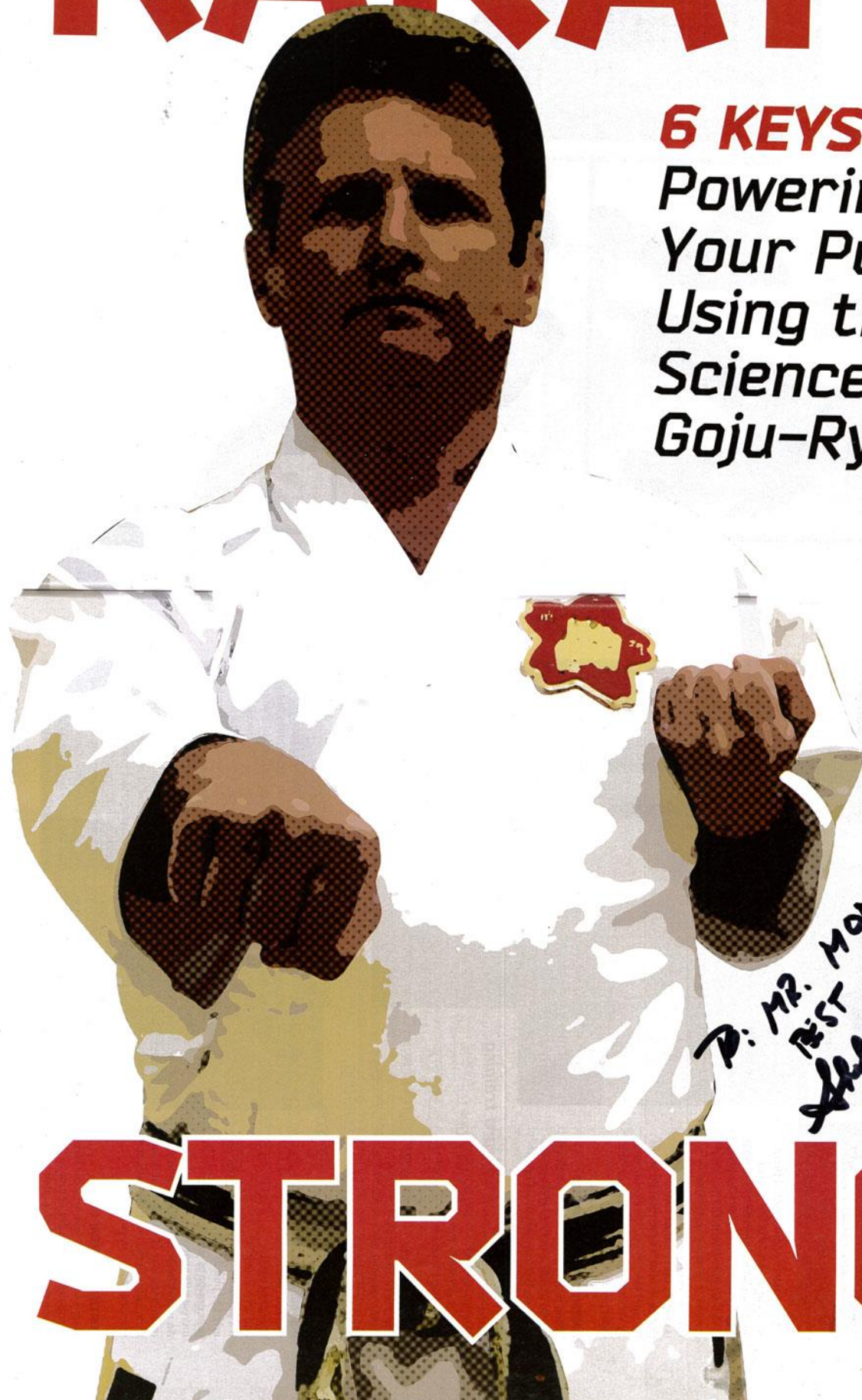


KARATE

6 KEYS to
Powering Up
Your Punch
Using the
Science of
Goju-Ryu!

BY SCOTT LENZI



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STRONG

As Okinawan *goju-ryu* master Seikichi Toguchi liked to point out, the role of the legs in his style of karate is primarily locomotion. They're used to move the body into position and then align it so a hand strike can be delivered. The reason is clear: Biomechanically, the most natural and effective weapon for human beings to use is the fist.

The masters of old devoted themselves to the study of the human body and how it functions in combat. In their research into the best ways to deliver power with the fist, they arrived at certain conclusions — that mechanics matter, that stance is crucial, that timing is important, that breathing is essential and so on. Decades later, these were confirmed by Western science. I'll examine the most pertinent ones here.

OPTIMIZE THE MECHANICS

When properly executed, a traditional karate punch generates great power. It's designed to penetrate an opponent's body, which is why it makes contact with the smallest possible surface area. Specifically, the index-finger knuckle (80 percent) and the middle-finger knuckle (20 percent) hit the target as the fist moves through space and rotates.

The force imparted by the punch depends on the linear and rotational speeds of the fist and arm. Provided it's performed properly, the punch will gain power as you increase its speed.

An unfortunate component of this formula is the loss of energy that results from joints in the body compressing in response to the impact.

FORTIFY THE WEAPON

Many striking arts feature some form of rotational punch, but unique to Okinawan *goju-ryu* and advocated by the

Makiwara training

is essential to develop a powerful, focused punch that can be delivered without creating unnecessary tension in the arm. The practice isn't designed to toughen the knuckles.



shorei-kan school is *chinkushi*. It was passed from Chojun Miyagi to many of his students, but few invested the time to master it. Chinkushi, which is taught in the *sanchin kata*, is crucial for a powerful

punch because it effectively transforms the arm into a single striking unit.

The best way to understand this concept is by feeling it. Begin the punch by twisting your forearm inward while slowly moving your fist forward. Keep your elbow and arm in constant contact with the side of your body. During the extension of the arm,

keep your shoulder down; don't let it move forward.

Just as you reach the point of contact, your forearm continues to twist in its natural direction while your upper arm (specifically, the elbow) simultaneously moves in the other direction, thus drawing the shoulder down and tightening the lat to allow for maximum energy transfer.

The effect, as pointed out by Toshio Tamano, senior student of Toguchi and current head of *shorei-kan* in Europe, is like taking a wet towel and twisting the ends in opposite directions to wring out the water. The more equal and opposite torsion there is, the more rigid the towel becomes. When no more twisting can be done, the towel is one

strong unit. Likewise, your arm effectively becomes one strong unit without requiring you to fully extend the elbow.

Chinkushi is the first link in the chain that needs to be forged to generate the most powerful punch possible. At this point, the *makiwara* enters the picture. The *makiwara* is designed not to develop calluses or enlarge knuckles but to strengthen the wrist, which easily can be bent or misaligned when striking. In other words, it's designed to foster chinkushi.

POSITION THE BODY

The fundamental stance of Okinawan goju-ryu is *sanchin dachi*. It permits quick and secure movement in any direction, but its primary function is to allow the lower body to be "separated" from the upper body, thus facilitating smooth and fast movement while balance is maintained for striking.

The *sanchin* stance is a relatively natural one that positions the feet shoulder-width apart and longitudinally aligned so the toes of the back foot are in line with the heel of the front foot. Weight is distributed evenly on the legs.

The feet are twisted approximately 10 degrees inward for added stability. Because the knees aren't locked, they allow the body to remain low and rooted and help you keep your focus on the *tanden*, the point located at the body's center of gravity, approximately 2 inches below the navel.

When Miyagi taught, he required his students to practice only *sanchin* kata for three years. He believed this training should form the basis for the

When training on the makiwara to increase penetration, it's important to proceed slowly and, if necessary, to use the non-punching hand to develop a feeling for proper chinkushi.



study of goju-ryu. His habit reminds us that holding this bent-leg position and moving while in it aren't part of everyday life — but they can be learned. Once your body has been reprogrammed, you're ready to learn the next level of goju-ryu theory and technique, in Miyagi's view.

MOBILIZE THE BASE

Now that you have a basic balanced stance, you need to be able to maintain it while advancing, retreating or simply shifting positions — and still be able to strike without telegraphing.

The type of movement that fits the bill in this situation is known as *suriashi*, or sliding. When you walk normally, you push off your back foot to take your next step. When you increase your speed and run, you angle your body forward to better push off. Although this is fine for a footrace, it's ineffective for fighting because your opponent can perceive your movement in his direction. In addition, your ability

to maintain balance is more difficult in a dynamic situation once a forward or backward push has been initiated. The result is often the creation of momentum in a specific direction with little or no ability to change course or stop.

The solution — moving in *suriashi* — begins with the *sanchin* stance. Your body is lowered because your knees are flexed. Your front foot moves ahead without tilting your body forward. Your front foot slides along the floor; it isn't raised the way it is when you walk. Because you haven't leaned forward, there's little or no extra weight on the leg, which further facilitates quick movement. Once your front foot finishes its travel, your back foot immediately moves into proper position to recreate the *sanchin* stance.

Of course, the distance between you and your opponent is critical when moving to transmit maximum power. Your ability to judge distance, or *maai*, before you strike and then to execute the strike with precision is critical.



In goju-ryu, the penetration of a punch is optimized by orienting the fist so that 80 percent of the power is delivered with the knuckle of the index finger and 20 percent with the knuckle of the middle finger, Scott Lenzi says.

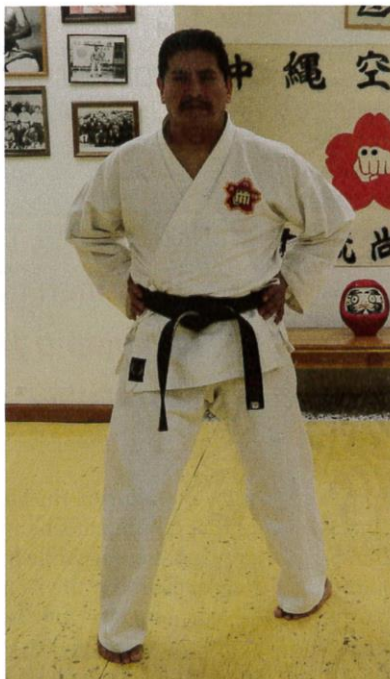
That entails knowing what your personal ability is with respect to closing the gap to reach your opponent, not to mention having excellent timing.

STRENGTHEN THE FOUNDATION

The term *gamaku* refers to power generation as it pertains to the aforementioned sanchin stance. It, along with *chinkushi*, is unique to Okinawan goju-ryu.

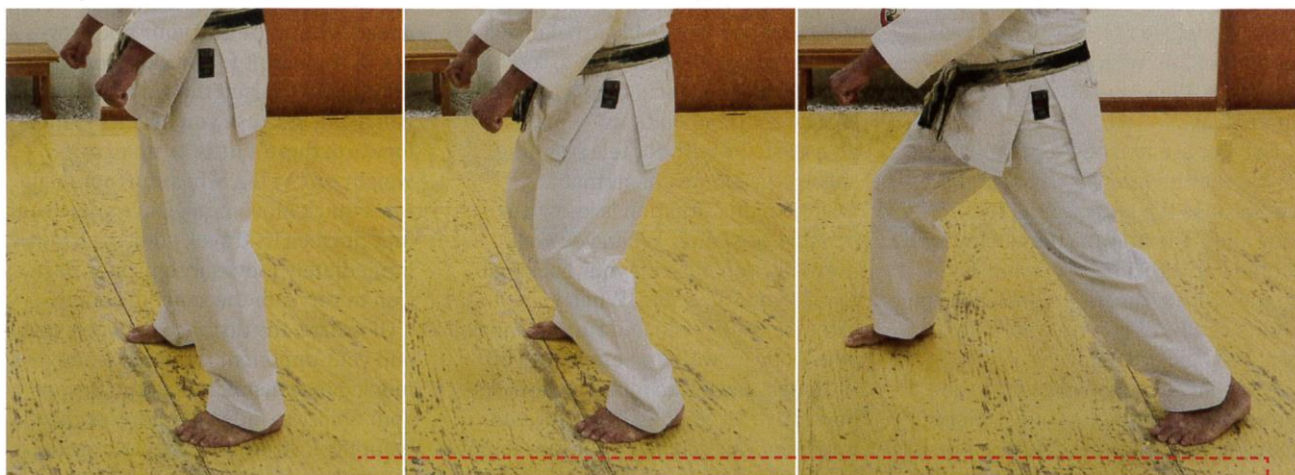
To maximize *gamaku*, assume the sanchin stance and, without raising your body, pivot your hips upward while keeping your knees bent. The motion creates a tension and rotational movement in the inner thighs and legs that try to make your feet turn outward. By maintaining the foot position of the sanchin stance, however, your legs become effectively locked because your hips are turned up as far as possible.

At no point are your knees fully extended or locked because doing so would impede your ability to statically and dynamically balance. In short, you need to avoid doing that to keep your stance both strong and supple.

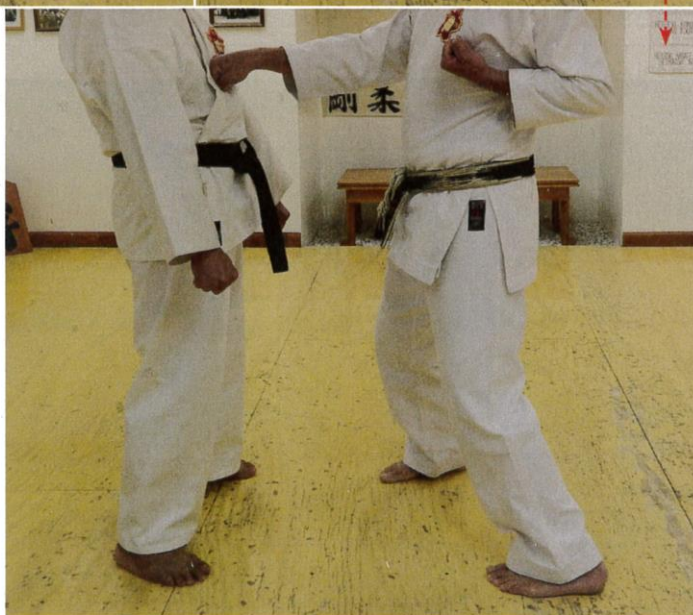


The sanchin dachi stance allows the karateka's upper body to transmit maximum force with a punch.

The heel-out position makes the stance strong while ensuring it remains supple and quick.



In goju-ryu, the **key to advancing without leaning or telegraphing is suriashi, or sliding.** The karateka sinks before sliding his right foot forward. He then slides his left foot forward to recreate the stance, after which he punches. Note how his body moves as a unit without leaning or pushing off his rear leg, which helps conceal the impending attack.





When all the variables discussed in this article — chinkushi, timing, stance, gamaku, distance and so on — are in order, a perfect karate punch results.

CONTROL THE BREATH

Being a *budo*, goju-ryu subscribes to a breathing method that's been used in the martial arts for many centuries. It entails inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth. The air is drawn deep into and then expelled from the lower abdomen, down by the tanden. This helps keep your center of gravity low while striking and blocking.

When you exhale, open your mouth slightly — as if you're smiling a little. At the end of each breath, momentarily place your tongue against the roof of your mouth, which allows you to better control your respiration and coordinate it with your strike.

A fringe benefit of this breathing method is it fortifies your core and locks it to the rest of your body before the punch makes contact. The connection is momentary, but it's crucial to

creating a powerful punch. Perhaps the best way to practice all the needed skills is performance of the sanchin kata.

ASSEMBLE THE PIECES

The following, then, are the main points to remember if you wish to maximize your karate punch:

- ▶ Relax your body by focusing your breathing and energy at your tanden.
- ▶ Draw your punching arm back while bending your knees to lower your stance.
- ▶ Keep your shoulder and elbow down as you slide your front foot forward.
- ▶ As you slide your rear foot forward to recreate the sanchin stance, begin extending and rotating your striking arm.
- ▶ Just before your punch makes contact, raise your hips and lock down

your shoulder as your hand rotates.

- ▶ Exhale to focus all your energy on the strike.

The result is a thing of beauty. All parts of the body are recruited to generate power in the punch. They function quickly, independently and fluidly — until the moment of impact. At this point, your body will be unified for the attainment of your goal. You will not waste any motion or do anything that compromises your balance before, during or after the strike. You will have effected a perfect punch. ✘

● **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** *Scott Lenzi is the senior student of Toshio Tamano, current head of shorei-kan goju-ryu. Before his death, Seikichi Toguchi made Lenzi the United States representative for the art. Lenzi assisted Toguchi in the writing of Okinawan Goju Ryu II: Advanced Techniques of Shorei-Kan Karate.*