

REVISITING HIP ROTATION: WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL? By Bruce Green.

The JKA Shotokan Darling?

Is hip rotation (*koshi no kaiten*) a secret ingredient of Shotokan karate techniques? That might admittedly be a bit dramatic, but hip or waist rotation is clearly a major point of emphasis in Shotokan karate as popularized by Nakayama sensei and practiced by the JKA and its myriad offspring organizations (e.g., ISKF, SKIF, JKS, WTKO, AJKA). Let's do a simple overview. Nakayama sensei tells us in *Best Karate – Comprehensive*:

"The explosive power of the finishing blow is created by the lower abdomen, particularly the rotation of the hips, which adds to the power of the upper body (emphasis added). In karate, the advice is often given to 'punch with your hips,' 'kick with your hips,' and 'block with your hips.'"

Use of the term 'finishing blow' coupled to hip rotation clearly recognizes hip use as a crucial ingredient of Shotokan karate, often captured succinctly by the term *ikken hissatsu*, to kill the aggressor or finish the physical altercation with one decisive blow.

Of course, if we're talking about Nakayama-influenced Shotokan karate, we can't overlook the concept of *kime* and *seika-tanden* when coupled to a decisive technique. *Kime* and *seika-tanden* are concepts that have been thoroughly discussed in authoritative books by Nakayama, Nishiyama, and Okazaki, and most recently, by SKM editor John Cheetham in his article titled 'Kime-Focus: The Concept Revisited', SKM Issue 141. Without losing sight of the importance of *kime*, let's stick to hip rotation in this short overview.

During present times, Naka sensei (JKA) highlights distinctive and sharp hip action, as seen in (*YouTube: Three methods to use hips – Naka Tatsuya*). He captures nicely what rapid, super-explosive hip-action can do, and how dynamic it is when coupled to a relaxed body state.

But hip rotation is certainly not unique to Shotokan karate. Okinawan Shorin-ryu master S. Nagamine in *The Essence of Okinawan Karate-Do* tells us:

"In all of the stances, it is essential for the student to master the proper coordination of the particular technique with the twisting motion of the hips."

Former Shukokai and Shito-ryu practitioner sensei Peter Consterdine has clearly found something in the value of a rapid hip action with his application of a double-hip rotation. He uses a hinged door analogy to describe the axis of hip rotation, although the front foot is the pivot

point (i.e., hinge), not the body's vertical center-of-gravity axis. As John Cheetham stated in the article referenced before, *"it's the strongest, most devastating punch I've ever felt while holding a pad."* That's strong – gets-my-attention testimony!

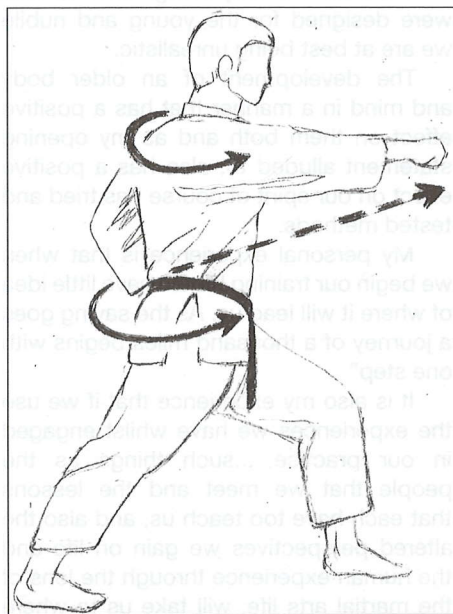
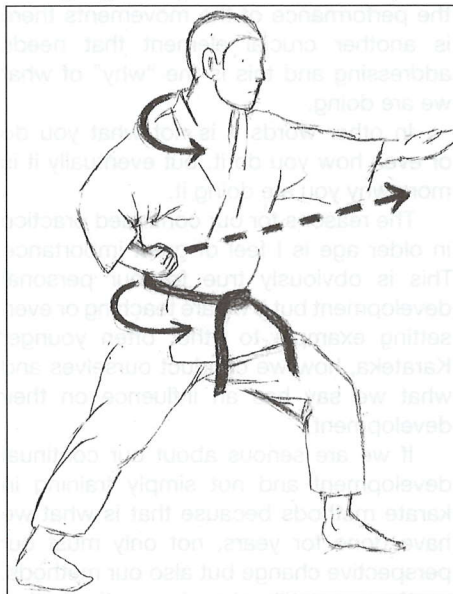


Illustration courtesy of Chloe Pachovas.

Hip Rotation Defined:

Here we concern ourselves with the region of the body around and below the waist and above the pelvic girdle. This lower abdominal region is also known as the *hara* or *seika-tanden*; more on that important topic later. The term rotation can easily be understood to mean horizontal twisting or turning, like hinged hips around a center axis, and including counter-rotation. A quick hip or waist twist becomes important as a method of generating torque forces or angular momentum and can be coupled

to numerous karate techniques such as *gyaku-zuki*, *soto ude-uke*, *mawashi-geri* or circular shifting.

In Nakayama sensei's indispensable *Dynamic Karate*, the author provides us with two helpful descriptions of hip twist...

"The turn of the hips produces the driving power necessary for strong techniques. A given amount of hip rotation at the extremities of the body, just as the turning of the drive shaft of a wheel creates a larger and faster movement at its outer surface. In a karate punch, the trunk works as the drive shaft."

As often cited when discussing hip rotation, we see every-day examples of the importance and potency of hip rotation in baseball when a batter swings at a pitched ball. Similarly, a golf swing used to drive a golf ball far coming off the tee stands as another obvious example of requisite hip rotation.

I remember well and often experienced T. Okazaki sensei's concentrated emphasis on the importance of hip rotation (and counter-rotation) in his practice and drill combinations (his hip rotation was almost spooky in how fluid, sharp, and extensive it was) and Yaguchi sensei's incredible demonstrations of hip rotation, driving action, and overall body *focus/kime*, both senior proteges of Nakayama sensei. As many of SKM readers might attest, this topic is prevalent in many JKA-influenced Shotokan karate training sessions or clinics, and it is a skill area of its own right in JKA-influenced Shotokan.

The Physiological Dimension:

The zone encompassing and including the *seika-tanden* is also the body's nominal center of gravity. Specifically, it is the waist and hip area (pelvis) and including the low stomach (rectus abdominus), rear end (gluteus maximus and sphincters), and tailbone (sacrum and coccyx). In terms of body movement and body balance, and as the body's center of gravity (*jushin*), the *seika-tanden* is essential when discussing kinesiology.

It is a mistake to refer to the hip as a moving joint – it is not. Author J.D. Swanson clarifies this point in his enjoyable book titled, 'Karate Science – Dynamic Movement'.

"Rather, it is the head of the femur in the ball-and-socket joint in the hip that completes the movement. It is the muscles that connect the legs to the hips that move the hip."

Aside from the brief anatomical description above, we needn't dive too deeply to appreciate that other

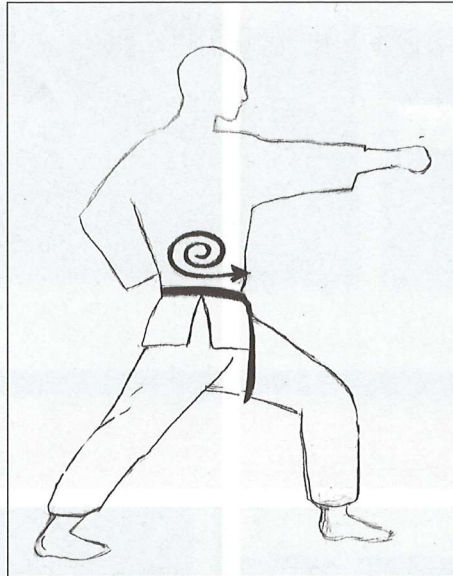
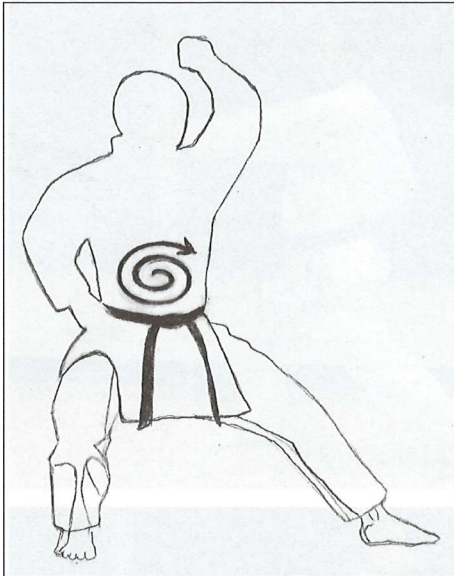


Illustration courtesy of Chloe Pachovas.

surrounding parts of the body (e.g., legs) provide for actual hip rotation. Other authors in SKM (e.g., G. Laich, T. Hanlon, J.D. Swanson) have covered this area quite well. Exercise physiologists tell us that having a high proportion of so-called fast-twitch muscle fibers enhances a sharp, quick rotation – think explosiveness (i.e., cut/slash with the hip or *koshi o kiru*). Hip rotation coordination and sharpness of action typically takes time and many repetitions to develop, especially to a high degree of rapid movement – again, think explosiveness.

The simple combination (above) of defensively shifting to *kokutsu dachi* and using a *jodan age-uke* (counter-rotation),

followed by a sharp body-center shift with hip rotation into *zenkutsu dachi* and execute *gyaku zuki* (forward rotation) makes the point of rear leg drive-power transmitted through the hip and into the counterattack. In fact, you have a chain reaction of heel drive to floor that triggers leg muscle drive into the hips which provides angular momentum to a *chudan gyaku-zuki*. At the moment of impact, be it blocking, punching, kicking or striking, the body's muscles and connective tissue 'lock down' sharply (contraction/compression phase; focus) and briefly, especially in the body's center area or *seika tanden* and extending outward into the trunk and other appendages (some



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have described this as a rapid wave or impulse action). Clearly highlighting the use of the leg muscles, Nakayama sensei states in *Dynamic Karate*:

"The abdominal muscles at the side play a major role in turning the hips. However, the power of the thigh muscles also contributes to smooth and powerful hip movements."

What Hinders Hip Rotation?

My personal sense after teaching for nearly 50 years is that many people (i.e., Westerners) just struggle with getting their hips to rotate quickly (if at all) and developing the coordination to do so. Westerners are generally impatient – as stated earlier, it takes time and diligent practice for most people to develop quick, full range-of-motion hip actions.

Often, full range-of-motion isn't achieved, and a truncated, half-done rotation is performed (if at all) and at reduced speed. Western culture places great emphasis in upper body strength and musculature. I believe the Japanese as a rule are far more 'in touch' with their body centers or *hara* region.

Having said this, another factor inhibiting proper use of the hips is not using the legs to sharply rotate or drive the hips. A recent SKM article Issue 145, by Dr G. Laich (*My Legs Don't Hit Anymore*) really highlights the use of the legs coupled with hip-rotation biomechanics. As Dr. Laich states: "*For punching to be effective the legs must provide the principal source of power and torque throughout the body.*"

We can really learn so much from our boxing friends and use of the legs to transmit punching force through the hips and trunk. Mike Tyson's use of leg and hip power was always quite exemplary; a super strong foundation used to unleash devastating punching power with his hips.

Developing the sharp or explosive use of the hips comes with learning to relax then quickly contract appropriate leg and hip region muscles and connective tissue. Basic hip twisting exercises, like described below, can help develop the parts of the body needed for the sharp hip actions demanded by high-level Shotokan karate.

How to Improve Hip Rotation:

The four-direction *gyaku-zuki* sequence found in *Unsu* in moves 9 through 15 are exemplary of fast hip twisting when done correctly. I have noticed that even so-called great performances by advanced karate competitors do not manifest complete hip rotations in this sequence, and each action seems to stop short of the desired full range of motion, thus negating the full impact of core compression and finishing *kime*.

The following three exercises capture some of the challenge of doing these rapid hip rotations in the *Unsu* sequence I've just mentioned. Working toward doing this



Unsu body-control sequence fully and with distinctive sharp hip-snap is a culmination to the following simple exercises I've derived from *Unsu*.

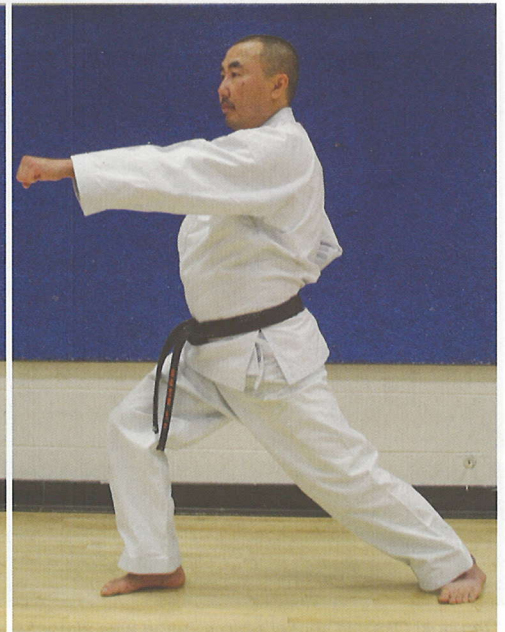
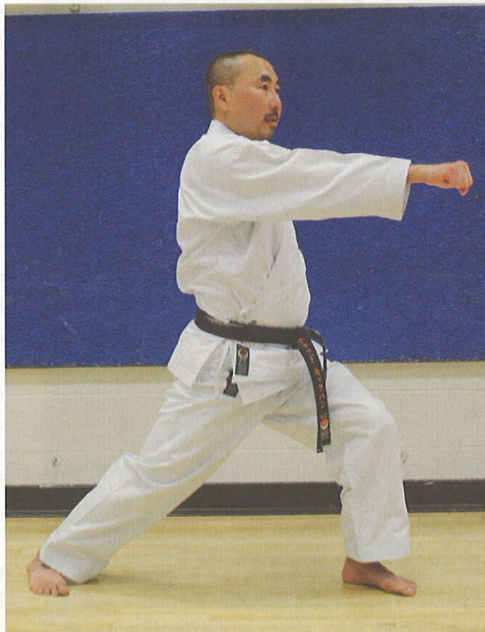
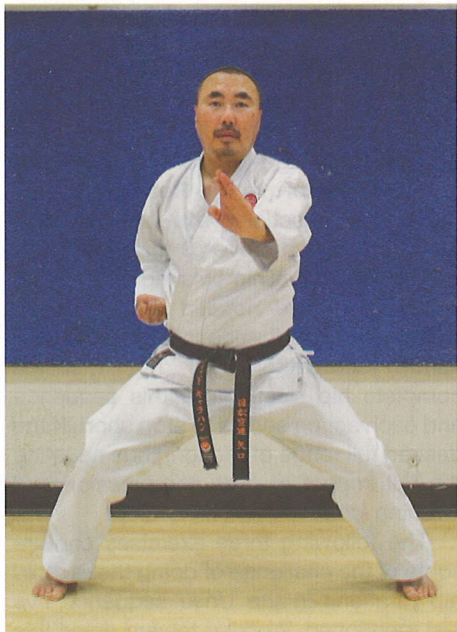
1) Start in a *shizentai* stance (above) body facing front, eyes looking to left side and left arm outstretched to the left, then pivot left 90° to *zenkutsu dachi* and do a *chudan gyaku-zuki* with the right arm. Do the same to the other side. This action also encourages practicing foot-movement coordination to attain proper

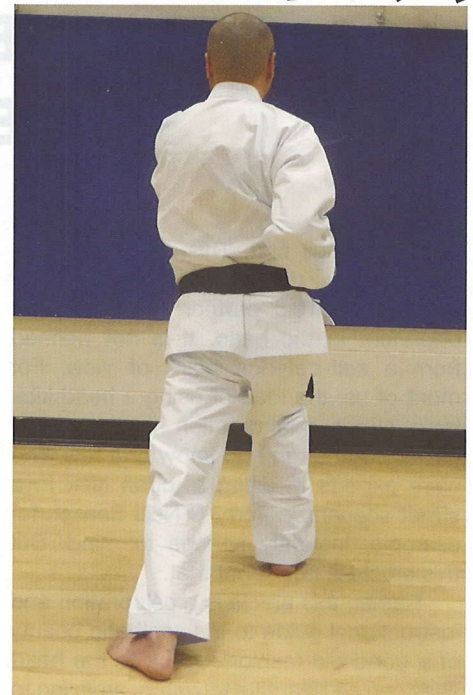
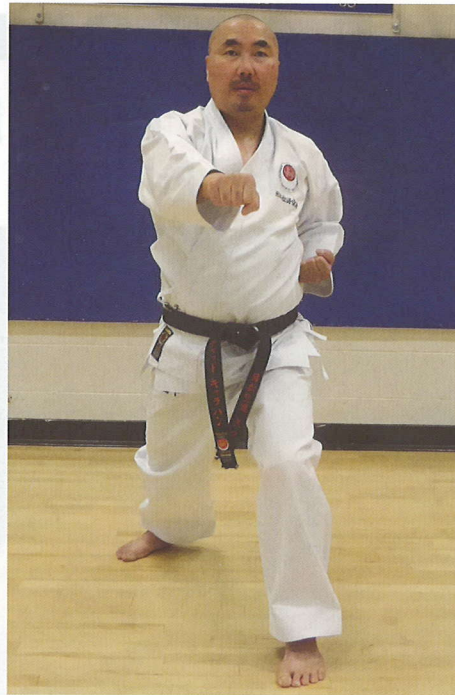
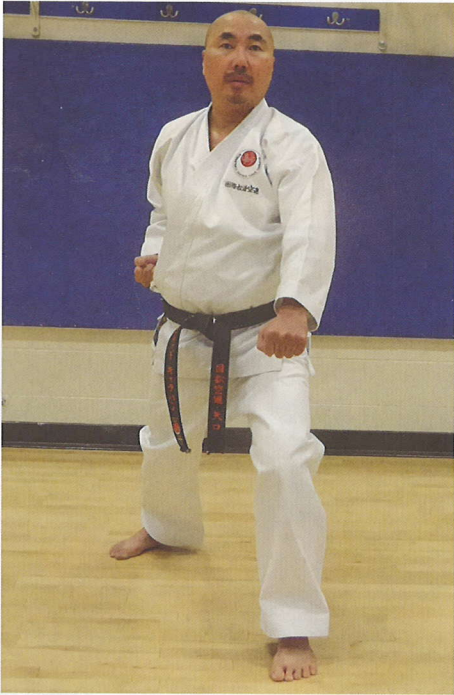
zenkutsu dachi geometry and back leg drive through the hips.

2) Start by facing forward in *kiba dachi* (below) with left-hand *chudan tate shuto-uke*. Sharply rotate to left front 45° corner and execute a *chudan gyaku-zuki* with right arm, then twist sharply to the other front 45° corner and execute a *chudan gyaku-zuki* with left arm. Once ready, speed up and do twice or more in each direction.

Next, add a blocking action with the left arm using counter-rotation (e.g., *ude-*

uchi uke) during the initial twist, followed by *gyaku zuki* with the right arm. Thus, this new sequence goes turn and block, then *gyaku zuki*, then twist to the other front 45° and block followed by *gyaku zuki*. When ready, do consecutively and repeatedly with increasing speed. Finally, this twisting exercise can be done with rear leg *mae-geri*. Twist 45°, then back leg *mae-geri*, then twist to other 45° and *mae geri* with other rear leg. Next, turn and *gedan barai* (counter-rotation) with





the front arm followed by back leg *mae-geri*, then twist and do likewise to the other 45° direction. Work up to doing this action two or four consecutive times with speed. Test your limits and work on aerobics by going as fast as possible consecutively and repeatedly.

3) The final simple exercise (above)

starts with left-leg forward in *zenkutsu-dachi* with *gedan-barai*, then do *chudan gyaku-zuki*. Pivot 180° behind by shifting rear foot over and *chudan gyaku-zuki*. Repeat back to front, then try 4 or 6 (or 8 or 10) consecutively, rapidly twisting the waist. Then add front-arm blocks (*jodan age-uke*, *chudan ude-uke*, or *gedan barai*).

You can also add twist then use rear leg *mae-geri* in place of *gyaku zuki*. Finally, block first with 180° twist, then back leg *mae-geri*. Now rev up the speed!

Contributed by Bruce Green, senior ISKF instructor, Colorado, photos by B. Green of Chad Callaghan, ISKF instructor, Colorado, illustrations by Chloe Pachovas.

NEVER HEEL UP
MICHAEL BUSHA

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NEVER HEEL UP
Devastating events can lead a person many different directions, some good and some not so good. Scars can last a long time. We have to find the right medicine to treat the wounds properly.
Tragedy misshaped the author's young family, leaving it in shambles. But after several years of emotional homelessness, the author finally walked into the right place at the right time. Needing something to pull himself out of that emotional turbulence, in 1978 he stepped up onto the dojo floor of a little red-brick building and entered another world.
Six years later, he found himself stepping onto another dojo floor. This time it was his first class at the JKA Ebisu Honbu (HQ) dojo in March of 1985 taught by Tanaka Sensei on a one-month "vacation" from his job at GM in Flint, Michigan. He trained daily with Nakayama Sensei and Kawawada Sensei at the Hoitsugan, along with many other instructors at the Honbu dojo. Realizing that this medicine was powerful and effective, Michael eventually quit his job and relocated to Japan a couple years later. This is the story leading up to that decision.
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