

SHOREI-RYU KARATE

How to Maximize the Efficiency of Your Response to an Attack

by Jim Brumbaugh

Every martial art includes some elite techniques that are reserved for the masters and advanced students. Often these are the most difficult and most effective techniques within a given system.

Okinawan *shorei-ryu* karate is no different. The system, which originated around 1890, contains within its 14 core *kata* (solo self-defense sequences) a group of techniques that appear to be ambiguous blocks or strikes. In reality, these are applications of *uchi-te*, also known as the "striking fist."

More accurately, these techniques may be called "striking blocks" because they act as blocks and strikes at the same time. The theory behind them is that anytime a practitioner blocks an attack, he or she should also strike the attacker and thus physically convince him that further attacks are futile.

The main advantage of *uchi-te* techniques is that they can provide an automatic response to an attack. This type of response is not to be confused with the common block-and-counter, which is more of a one-two combination. *Uchi-te* techniques are unique because they avoid the time lag inherent in performing a distinct block and then following with a counterattack.

In their highest form, *uchi-te* techniques consist of a simultaneous block and attack using the same arm. While techniques that employ only one arm may seem simple at first, they can be quite difficult to execute because of the precise angle, speed, deflection and extension needed to reach the target while making sure the opponent's attack is negated. And to make things more challenging, all this must happen at the same time—or the techniques won't work. For most martial artists, the complexity of the maneuvers demands that years of practice be invested for them to work properly.

The anaku kata of shorei-ryu karate contains a self-defense sequence in which the attacker (left) reaches forward with both hands to choke the defender. The defender shifts slightly back with one foot and simultaneously delivers an upper block using his right arm and an uppercut using his left.

Because of the very nature of *uchi-te* techniques, they must be applied when the attacker is up close. This requires that the defender step toward the attacker—instead of away from him as is the natural reaction for most martial artists.

Shorei-ryu karate's sepai and pinan kata teach an advanced uchi-te technique that uses one arm to block and the other to attack. After the defender (left) moves to the outside of the path of the punch, he delivers a simultaneous right-arm middle block and left-arm roundhouse punch to the head.





As the attacker is about to move forward, the defender (right) prepares to respond with an uchi-te technique from the naihanchi kata (1). When the punch is thrown, the defender steps to the outside of the line of attack and readies his blocking/striking hand (2). The defender then simultaneously blocks the attacker's arm with his forearm and counterattacks with a hammerfist to the head (3).

In a routine from shorei-ryu karate's wansu kata, the attacker (left) prepares to step forward and punch (1). The defender steps aside and positions his hand for a circular pushing block (2). Just as the block moves the attacker's punching arm out of the way, the defender delivers a reverse punch to the attacker's head (3).

Safely stepping toward the attacker requires excellent footwork so the practitioner can close the gap and properly execute the technique. Also needed are excellent evasion

skills, which will prevent the martial artist from being struck by the opponent's attack.

For many, the idea of getting right up next to an opponent is reason enough not to even try to learn uchi-te techniques.

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Shorei-ryu karate's *naihanchi* kata teaches a useful *uchi-te* response to a kick. As the attacker (left) prepares to advance with a front kick (1), the defender moves toward him and brings his knee up to intercept the incoming kick (2). Then the defender extends his foot into the attacker's groin while his kicking leg blocks the attacker's kick (3).

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However, it is when an attacker is up close and personal that the techniques become devastatingly effective.

One Hand

One example of an *uchi-te* technique is the apparent forearm block that shows up halfway through shorei-ryu's *naihanchi* kata. As performed in the kata, the technique seems to be a somewhat awkward method for stopping a punch to the face.

In reality, however, when the defender swings his blocking arm upward in an arc that intercepts the attack at precisely the correct position, his fist is supposed to make contact with the attacker's face at the same time his forearm makes contact with the incoming punch. The target for the striking portion of the technique can be the temple, the side of the head or the neck.

Step by step, the technique would proceed like this: The attacker moves in to punch, and the defender steps to the outside of the attack using a lead-foot shuffle at about a 45-degree angle. Then he cocks his blocking/striking arm. Next, the defender moves his arm in a tight circle so it makes contact with the attacker's punching arm at the correct location—so the fist can simultaneously reach its target. The angle of contact where the defender's blocking forearm crosses with the attacker's punching arm and the distance between the attacker and defender are critical to the success of this technique.

Two Hands

There are also *uchi-te* techniques in which the blocking hand is not always the same as the striking hand. Once again, it is important to remember that these are not one-two combinations; rather, they involve the simultaneous delivery of a block and a strike with two hands.

Examples of this type of *uchi-te* technique can be seen in the *sepai* kata and the *pinan* kata series. Here, the techniques at first appear to be some type of elaborate double block that uses simultaneous upper and middle blocks. But when viewed with a knowledge of *uchi-te*, it becomes obvious that they are a simultaneous middle block (called *chudan uke* in Japanese) and roundhouse punch (or *mawashi tsuki*).

Proceeding through the sequence step by step, the attacker begins to deliver his punch, and the defender moves out of the line of attack and toward his opponent by stepping into a cat stance, which is called *neko ashi dachi*. At the same time, the defender readies both hands by cocking them together to the opposite side of his body from the attack. An *uchi-te* technique is then performed by swinging both hands in an arc to the target so that the block and the strike make contact at the same time.

Another example comes from the *ananku* kata. In this form, what first appears to be a combination of an upper block (or *jodan uke*) and a middle block is, in fact, an advanced two-handed *uchi-te* technique. As the attacker rushes in and tries to grab the defender so he can execute a two-handed choke, the defender steps back just enough to provide clearance. He then uses an upper block to push the attacker's hands out of the way. At the same time, the defender's other hand comes up underneath and makes



contact with an uppercut (or *noboru seiken tsuki*) to the chin.

While executing this technique, the defender must take care to shift backward just enough to have the proper distance to block and strike at the same time. Moving back too far will negate the technique. To get more power in both the block and punch, the defender can bend slightly at the knees and then thrust upward with his legs.

A more obvious example of *uchi-te*, one that is easier to master, comes from the *wansu* kata. It is a pushing block (or *nagashi barai*) that is accompanied by a reverse punch (or

gaku soiken tsuki). As the attacker begins to punch, the defender side-steps forward at about a 45-degree angle and begins to push the attack aside and downward. At the same time, the defender's other hand delivers a strong reverse punch to the attacker's solar plexus, chin or other vital spot.

The Feet


Expanding the uchi-te principle even further, it is possible to see how it applies to foot techniques. An example of this can be found in the naihanchi kata. As the attacker moves forward with a front kick (or *mae geri*), the defender raises his knee to block. Then, as the knee makes contact with the inside of the attacking leg, the defender extends his leg as an integral part of the blocking motion and delivers a front-kick counterattack to the groin. In naihanchi, only the knee block (or *hiza uke*) is demonstrated; this leaves the front-kick counterattack as a hidden technique.

From these examples, it can be seen that uchi-te techniques are indeed some of the most difficult and most effective moves to be found in the arsenal of shorei-ryu karate. Martial artists should know, however, that it takes years of practice to coordinate the footwork and hand movements into an instantaneous response that will work in combat. It is even harder to develop the iron will, self-confidence and determination required to move toward an attacker to get close enough for uchi-te techniques to work.

Once perfected, however, these techniques can stop an assailant almost before he begins his attack. ✖

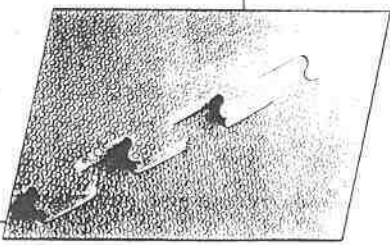
About the author: Jim Brumbaugh lives in Mentor, Ohio. His martial arts training, which has included judo, shotokan karate, taekwondo and shorei-ryu karate, began in 1963.

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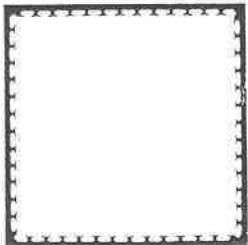


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