

# Sanchin

## *Secrets Revealed*

**Sanchin kata has many meanings and it is performed two ways according to Kanryo Higanno and Chojun Miyagi.** Both performed it with great power and focus and to see the differences in the two ways, I serialised five interviews with senior Goju Ryu and Goju Kai karate instructors from England and Europe. Tony Childs (5th dan Goju Kai) and Mark Adams (4th dan Goju Kai) were kind enough to allow me to interview their instructor, Ingo de Jong (7th dan). Ingo is the Chief Instructor for Europe IGKA.

**What grade are you in Goju Kai and what position do you hold within your association?**

**INGO DE JONG:** I have studied Goju Kai Karate-Do for approx 38 years. My position is that of Director for Goju Kai Karate in Europe and Vice-resident of the International Karate Do Goju Kai Assc. I help organize annual training seminars in European countries and I conduct instructor seminars in Scandinavia.

**Do you perform Sanchin kata according to the way of Kanryo Higanno or of Chojun Miyagi?**

**INGO DE JONG:** Actually I have no knowledge of the two ways of sanchin kata performed by K. Higanno or C. Miyagi. I had the good fortune to have numerous talks with the late Hanshi Gogen Yamaguchi on the ways of Sanchin and the importance of correct breathing, as well as having practised the kata for approx. 35 years under the tutelage of Shihan Goshi Yamaguchi - and that has allowed me to make some observations.

As I understand it, Sanchin Kata has many variants and can be approached from different angles. There is a visible manifestation of breathing (go) as well as an invisible (ju) function of

breathing. The more audible form of breathing was practised in the earlier days of training in sanchin. This went hand in hand with muscle tension. However as I gained more understanding I preferred to keep the upper part of my body more relaxed and the bottom half of the body more sturdy, feet firmly planted to the floor in a sanchin-dachi. Then concentrating the breath into the lower part of the body (approx. 2-3 inches below the navel), one becomes more 'rooted' (so to speak). The analogy of a tree comes to my mind here. The roots are firmly planted into the ground, and the branches flexible and moving with the wind.

I found I was able to move more efficiently by having the upper part of the body slightly more relaxed. After repeated practice I discovered that I could gather energy through concentrating on power in a spot about three inches inside and back of the navel. I found this energy could be directed by the will to various parts of the body - such as the fist, or the palm of the hand. But this needs considerable practice!

I call this principle of directing energy by the mind 'The invisible function' of breathing.

The sound effects of the breathing appeared later on but the fact remains: you can practise Sanchin or Tensho either silently or audibly because the important aspect is not to make the sound, but to control the breath and direct the energy flow! Incidentally, I find that the dynamic tension aspect should not be overdone because lesser upper body tension eases the energy flow.

**It is said that Sanchin is the most important kata within Goju. Why do you think that is?**

**INGO DE JONG:** Sanchin I am told means, 'three way battle' or conflict. Correct breathing is one of the most important aspects in the practice of karate-do. Proper breathing is a science in itself and it is essential to both our spiritual and our physical health. Proper diaphragmatic breathing is basic to all martial arts as well as to all forms of meditation. Inner power or energy is both mental and physical. The technique, the mind and the breath must work together and one must come to realize that these three principles are not separate from one another.

The essence of Sanchin lies in correct breathing and a correct stance - though these two aspects are important to all kata training. So therefore one could consider Sanchin a foundation for all kata in our system. However to state that Sanchin is THE most important kata in our art is perhaps an over-statement. One should consider all aspects of training of equal importance in order to become proficient in the art.

**What benefits does Sanchin deliver to karateka?**

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**INGO DE JONG:** One learns about internal and external power through training Sanchin. External power means power in action and movement. Internal power is the mental counterpart of each physical action. Diligent sanchin practice teaches the student that mind and body work together and each must be aware of the other. By directing attention within and not wholly without, a doorway opens in what may have hitherto appeared to be a blind wall. Those who have trained for a long while pass through the doorway and enter a new phase in their training.

Prolonged and steady practice is the secret to success! The value of sanchin training will be far better understood if students gain their own experience through daily training and thus test the value of the teachings for themselves.

When we inhale, we take in fresh air. When we exhale, we breathe out used air. This brings about a cleansing. Both inhaling and exhaling are done through concentrating the breath in the lower abdomen. This form of deep breathing - in coordination with tension in the lower part of the body (and to some degree in the upper part) - will help improve the blood circulation and increase the flow of fresh oxygen. This helps build health in general and hopefully results in a better resistance to disease.

Concentration means focusing the mind. The karateka concentrates, focusing his attention upon each breath. Such deliberate focus trains concentration and stimulates awareness of energy flow. Persistent practice of concentration is the first step towards control of thought. Control of thought leads to self-mastery!

**Explain, please, the methodology of testing Sanchin.**

**INGO DE JONG:** In the earlier days of practice it was customary to test students doing Sanchin by slapping and hitting the body - even by punching! The purpose, if any, of this was perhaps to test the students' will.

Nowadays we test the power of stances, the tightening of the buttocks in sanchin-dachi and we make the student aware of lower abdominal breathing (as opposed to high chest breathing). With more advanced students, we concentrate on the mental aspects of the kata. Nowadays we put more emphasis on correct breathing and the mental aspects.

As stated previously I think it is important to grip the floor with one's feet so as to tighten the buttocks. We also need to rotate the pelvis in a forward/upward motion when breathing out.

Proper sanchin-dachi enables the student to generate power in a punch over a short distance. The power is generated from the feet and twisting the hip into the punch brings together and unites whole body power so it can be focused into the punch. The result is an almost whip-like action.

**Previously students completed Sanchin with three breaths yet only one breath is used in Japanese Goju Kai. Comments?**

**INGO DE JONG:** We always ended Sanchin with a single breath, and I can make no comments why Sanchin is ended with three breaths in other styles.

**How much breath should be left in the hara after you perform a punch or block?**

**INGO DE JONG:** One loses tension through releasing all breath from the lower abdomen, then this will result in weakness!

Another factor to consider is that the karateka will feel a strong urge to inhale before performing the next movement and the result will be a discoordination between breath and movement. But as I have already said, breath-mind-technique must function as a coherent whole. So to maintain proper tension in the hara and to keep control of the breath throughout the performance of sanchin (as well as any other kata) it is necessary to retain around 30% of air in the hara after exhaling. Another important factor is to keep the stomach tense when inhaling as well!

**Students are often exhausted through the practice of Sanchin!**

**INGO DE JONG:** Yes, the beginner may feel exhausted, because he or she tensed the muscles too much.

As I stated before I do not believe in overly tensing the muscles of the upper body. This decreases the energy flow. My opinion is that if you treat Sanchin like an isometric exercise, then your practice will surely lose some of its value! There are far better isometric exercises to use than Sanchin!

Look on Sanchin as a means to develop inner power!

Most students are not able to focus the mind for long period. But learning to focus is essentially the same as that of learning any new technique. You develop skill only after sustained effort. As the technique is mastered, so the action becomes more and more effortless and then almost automatic! As a matter of fact, the more one comes to grips with Sanchin, the more rejuvenated one feels after practice!

**Do you think that doing Sanchin with lots of power and heavy breathing is dangerous and could this lead to hyperventilation?**

**INGO DE JONG:** If the student starts to hyperventilate then that means his breath is too high up in the chest! The breath has to be brought down into the lower abdomen. Also one needs to keep the throat relaxed and not try to force the air out. Deep abdominal breathing - if done correctly - is not dangerous and can actually promote health!

Proper breathing is the essence of all martial art. Hard and soft does not only apply to the execution of techniques. It applies even more so to the state of mind whilst performing a technique. By changing the breath, one changes one's state of mind and thus the energy flow between hard and soft is affected. I remember the late Hanshi Gogen Yamaguchi telling me that he got to know a lot about a student's character by watching him perform kata.

Another important factor of correct breathing is that it affects the rhythm of the kata. There will be a natural flow between hard and soft. If we use the correct breathing, and this makes for a harmonious kata. Nowadays one sees unnatural long pauses between techniques performed during kata competitions. This is just posing!

**What has practice of Sanchin taught you personally?**

**INGO DE JONG:** It's given me a better understanding of coordination between breath and movement, as well as teaching me the importance of directing energy flow through the mind.

**I believe you have done some studies to see how exactly the practice of Sanchin affects the way the body works.**



**INGO DE JONG:** In 1976 I visited a medical institute in Stockholm to discover how practice of Sanchin affected the body. The tests were overseen by a Dr. Melker and this is what he had to say:

- 1: one should not practice Sanchin for longer than thirty minutes, because of the intake of oxygen;
- 2: it would not be advisable for unfit persons to perform the kata because of the way performance sent the pulse soaring. Older or less fit persons should perform the kata slowly and with soft breathing;
- 3: Sanchin practice accelerates the flow of blood through the body and increases the flow through those bloodvessels supplying the heart;

**So what span of training do you cover in your dojo?**

**INGO DE JONG:** Our training is based on traditional Goju Kai Karate-Do practice in the Hombu Dojo of Scandinavia. This includes the many aspects of training, such as pads, bagwork, chi-ishi as well as training for competition in both kata and kumite for the younger members. Some instructors have also been involved with cross-training and wrestling.

It is difficult to achieve proper harmony between hard and soft! Sometimes the student uses too much power when performing kata. Therefore we practise a lot of relaxation. By this I mean we perform the various kata in slow motion. Proper soft sanchin breathing in coordination with the movements helps the students to relax and not waste energy. The result is a greater harmony between hard and soft.

**How often do you get to visit your Sensei for training and discussion?**

**INGO DE JONG:** Shihan Yamaguchi and I meet once or twice a year on a regular basis. Each time we meet I take the opportunity to train with him and to discuss and exchange ideas.

**What are your personal philosophies?**

**INGO DE JONG:** First and foremost, I believe that good times or bad times do not stop training!

I am a professional karate teacher - yet I feel I learn a lot from my students. We are not just students of those above us and teachers of those below us. We are both students and teachers of all those wanting to learn the way of karate-do.

The best way to learn anything is to teach it to another because in making an effort to clarify the techniques you want to teach, you come to understand them better yourself. We are all each others' students and teachers.

Karate training should be practised as a fighting art but it is easier for a stronger man to beat a weaker person than the other way round - but be sure that there will come a time when even the strongest fighter will be defeated by someone who is better!

But if we train in our art for self-improvement, then it becomes a lifelong pursuit that is worthwhile. Be sure that the two elements - karate training and application in life - must complement one another.

**When do you next plan to visit Britain?**

**INGO DE JONG:** I'll be visiting England during March 2007.

**Thank you Ingo de Jong for your time and to Tony Childs and Mark Adams for helping to arrange this interview.**

