

The Bunkai of Basics III - Hikite

By Matthew Miller

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If your Karate is “traditional” in the sense often meant – that is, based around the three k’s (kihon, kata and kumite), then the title of this article may surprise you. Hikite, the pulling hand, is rarely thought of as a basic technique, but rather as a component of other basics. In this role, it is almost ubiquitous – there are few basic techniques where the returning hand is not pulled sharply back to the waist as the opposite hand extends.

Relegating the pulling hand to the status of a subsidiary or secondary movement, however, can lead to it being neglected when studying. This is a great shame – the sheer extent to which it appears throughout karate basics and kata makes it the most commonly performed technique, if it is viewed that way, and it has a great value when applied that befits this frequency.

Very often, the explanation that accompanies this technique when it is first taught is that the pulling action assists in accelerating the hand performing the technique, and that returning the hand to the hip prepares it for the next technique. By others, this is deprecated, the argument being that returning the hand to the waist is unnecessary, and exposes the head to easy attack.

This latter argument would seem valid, if the only use of the pulling hand was to return it to the waist – however, this is not the case.

Gichin Funakoshi, in his early book “Karate Jutsu”, classifies Hikite alongside all other hand techniques. His definition is one which provides a good insight into the usefulness of this technique.

“...the meaning of hikite, or pulling hand, is to grab the opponent’s attacking hand and pull it in while twisting it as much as possible so that his body is forced to lean against the defender”

This provides a clear use for this method, and a reason to draw the hand back sharply – it is grasping the opponent. It is this view of the hikite that I will expand upon in this article.

Hikite – The basic technique

There are two forms of hikite commonly seen in basic techniques, depending upon whether it is performed in a front stance or long cat stance. However, both share the same basic method of performance.

The hand that is to perform hikite begins the technique in an extended position, with the palm of the hand down. The hand is then rotated during the first part of its withdrawal, until the palm faces upwards. The hand continues to withdraw. In the case of a front stance, it finishes at the hip, whilst in the case of the cat stance, it tends to complete near the solar plexus.

Examples of each method are shown below – for the basic down block and knife hand block.



(1a.Hikite in front stance 1b.Hikite in long cat stance)

These two techniques appear different to some extent, but are seen to be identical when the hikite is used to grasp the opponent: -



(2a.Hikite in front stance 2b.Hikite in long cat stance)

In both cases, the opponent is grasped by the wrist, and the arm drawn into the performer's centre; in the case of the front stance, the hips are square to the front and it is possible to draw the arm to the side of the hip. In the case of the cat stance, however, the hips and body are turned sideways, so the arm is drawn across the front of the body rather than to the side. The hikite action is exactly the same – it is the position of the body and hips relative to this that alter.

Bunkai

Unlike the earlier articles in this series, this one will not present multiple differing applications for a single technique – rather, it will concentrate upon the various ways in which the method espoused by Funakoshi can be developed to make this particular technique into a potent tool in the fighter's armoury.

The most basic method for hikite relies upon the performer gaining contact with the opponent's wrist with the outer side (little finger side) of the forearm. It is this touch

contact to which the performer reacts, rapidly wrapping the hand around the wrist, pulling and twisting.

Depending upon which side of the wrist is contacted, then the result will be one of the following:-



(3a.Outside to outside contact... 3b.The arm is locked straight by hikite)



(4a.Outside to inside contact... 4b.The arm is rotated, overbalancing the opponent)

In either case, however, the principles and benefits of the technique are the same, and reflected in Funakoshi's definition: -

1. The action of wrapping and twisting the wrist causes the opponent to be overbalanced. In the case of outside / outside contact, the opponent is caused to bend forward, whilst with inside / outside contact, the twist causes the opponents back to arch. Unbalancing is a valuable technique in preventing the opponent from initiating or continuing an attack. It also prevents effective defence.
2. The drawing in of the arm accelerates the opponent towards the performer, or restrains them from moving away from any incoming strike. In both cases, this magnifies the effectiveness of the strike.
3. Maintaining contact with the opponent allows the performer to easily locate the areas to be targeted.