

The Six Parts of Bunkai



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Executive Summary

This report is a compilation of my findings and opinions concerning the subject of kata bunkai. Also contained in here are descriptions of Oyo, Henka, Hyoshi, Omote, Ura and Honto.



Let's first begin with an explanation of Kata. The Japanese word "Kata" means form, although it is usually translated as "formal exercise". Kata are sets of movements or techniques, performed in the same way every time. This is known as Embusen (the line or direction of kata). Kata is performed with varying speed, strength, and athleticism. Kata performed correctly are both physically and mentally demanding. Kata must be practiced with bunkai (applications); this is where the techniques performed in the kata are used against an opponent. Practicing the kata in this way will enable the karate-ka to use the kata for self-defense. We could also say that kata is a detailed choreographed set of self-defense movements put into sequences that are easily remembered by the practitioner.

Bunkai is the "analysis" or "interpretation" of the techniques and movements contained within each kata. In other words, breaking down the techniques into small sets of movements that can be applied in a self-defense situation. There can be many different practical applications of the analysis for each movement or set of techniques. I view this as if looking at a math problem. Let's take the number eight. There can be many ways to arrive at that number. In example... 2×4 , $4 + 4$, $1 + 7$ and so on. The result will always be the same. In this case, the number eight. With bunkai, the result would be that your attacker is on the ground or immobilized. I believe that the analysis should be realistic and understandable by the karate-ka. If it is not, then the practical application of the techniques in self-defense would not work.

Now there are other things that we need to understand when talking about bunkai. They are Oyo, Henka, Hyoshi, Omote, Ura and Honto. As each of us goes through our martial arts journey, we must always think outside the box when talking about them. I will describe each below.

Oyo is the result of bunkai. Here we take what we have learned from the analysis of the kata and practice it with a partner. We try out the ideas we have come up with, and through trial and error we discover a practical solution to the technique. There may be several Oyo to one technique. In example, a step-in rising block followed by a step-in rising block may be a block followed by a strike to the throat or it could be a block followed by a strike to the head and then a takedown. A chest block in cat foot stance could be a grab with a kick to the opponents' leg or it could be a block followed by a takedown.

Henka is a development of Oyo. It is the change within the movements and techniques. Once we have discovered what the technique means and how to apply it, we can develop variations to that technique. The henka may not look identical to the movement found in the kata. However, the variation must have the same principle found in the kata and displayed in the bunkai and Oyo. For example, a rising block with a step-in punch to the middle of the body could be changed to a rising block with step-in punch to the face.

Hyoshi literally means “hands” clapping. It is used to create rhythm. Every set of movements in a kata has a rhythm. Sometimes we go fast. Sometimes we go slow. Sometimes we go fast and slow within the same set of movements.

Omote means “surface” in Japanese. Or in other words, “What you see is what you get”. This means that every movement and technique is simple and direct. A block is a block and a strike is a strike. In viewing bunkai in this manner, practical self-defense must be easy to remember and simple to execute. Another way to understand this concept in real life, Omote refers to the image which an individual or a company wishes to present itself to outsiders or the public in general.

Ura means “hidden”. This is the opposite of Omote. Within the analysis of the techniques and movements in a kata, there are hidden meanings. In example, a block could be a choke-hold. There are many hidden techniques contained within each kata. Only through the diligent practice of Oyo does one uncover these meanings. In real life, this would be what is hidden inside an individual or company that they don’t want the public to see.

Honto means “real” or “true”. In bunkai, it means “truth”. What is the real truth within the bunkai and omote for each technique and movement? A karate-ka can only keep researching and practicing finding the real truth. And try not to end up in a catch-22. This is where an analysis of the kata looks exactly like the kata but is highly unrealistic and we call it “omote”. Or the analysis of the kata looks nothing like the actual kata, and we call it “ura”.