

KOKUTSU DACHI (BACK STANCE)

'The Awkward Stance' By Scott Langley

Kokutsu Dachi, (back stance) especially when we first start learning karate, is often considered an awkward, cumbersome and impractical stance. Even after years of training many karateka regard Kokutsu Dachi as their slowest, weakest and most unstable stance, as it lacks the strong, penetrating hip movement of zenkutsu dachi, or the immovable, rooted feeling of kiba dachi. However, is kokutsu dachi destined to remain relegated to a stance we learn to pass gradings or only apply in kata?

Does not the unique way in which the hips are used teach us body mechanics, vital to the maximising of our body's efficiency? And why is it that instructors such as Kagawa sensei and Osaka sensei make their kokutsu dachi look unbelievably solid and powerful?

(All the photo examples are left leg forward Kokutsu dachi).

We must first look at the stance in situ. The first and most obvious mistake students make is weight distribution. How many times have you heard your instructor say, '70% of your weight on the back leg and 30% on the front'? But how many people actually do this. In order to have the 70/30 ratio your right shoulder, hip, knee and foot must be in one complete line. As soon as this line is broken you lose perfect weight distribution.

A simple way to practice this is to stand with the right side of your body against a wall, then slowly lower yourself

down into stance. The moment one of the above mentioned points loses contact with the wall, you have lost correct posture.

This exercise also prevents students from pushing their right knee out and back, putting excess strain on their joints and risking long-term damage. The knee is a hinge joint, and as such should only be bent forwards and backwards, without straining left and right.

The left leg points directly forward and should always remain slightly bent. Unlike zenkutsu dachi where the outer part of the foot points straight forward, in kokutsu dachi the whole foot points forward down an axis running through the middle. Like the foot, the left knee points directly forward too, never moving to either side, exactly like zenkutsu dachi. And, of course, the left hip and shoulder are in one line (looking from the front), without your backside sticking out, or your body leaning forward.

Once your stance is sorted out, you must then concentrate on hip rotation. Like zenkutsu dachi, we use hip movement in kokutsu dachi by pivoting from the front hip.

However, unlike zenkutsu dachi, in kokutsu dachi, hanme-shomen practice is often neglected by instructors, never allowing it to become strong. However, with practice, kokutsu dachi hip movement can become as powerful as zenkutsu dachi. For proof of this one only needs to see Isaka sensei here in Tokyo

do makiwara training in kokutsu dachi.

To perform hanme the hip should be at a complete right angle to the back leg, and should have the feeling of squeezing your abdomen/groin area against the side of your inner right thigh. You should also have the feeling of pulling the groin/abdomen area up, so your rear does not stick out. The left (front) hip should be relaxed, so that when you pull the right side hip back, the action doesn't pull the left leg and knee to one side.

Once in this position, changing to shomen is similar to the way we do it in zenkutsu dachi. Simply push the right side hip forward whilst pivoting around the left side hip (because the hip is a ball and socket joint, it allows the hip and thigh to move forward without changing the knee and lower leg position). At this time the right side hip must be relaxed so as not to pull the right knee in, with the hip movement. To prevent this you must imagine pushing against the knee (the same idea that was mentioned in my previous article on zenkutsu dachi, in SKM issue No.60).

It is important to note here that if this hip movement is done properly then the right shoulder, hip and knee line (mentioned above) is broken and so, too, is the 70%/30% weight distribution. However, I feel it is an often misunderstood concept that within all stances, weight changes, from hanme to shomen, as part of the power generation. Without the linear movement back and



Half-way stage to stepping forward - shuto uke.



Stance in situ, right shoulder, hip, knee in line.



Maintaining stance, twist hips, torso into punch.

forth we only have a twist, which is only half the potential power. And as long as the position from the knees down remains solid, the stance is good.

Once the stance is sorted out, it is then important to concentrate on the movement. The back leg in kokutsu dachi can act like a spring, much more than the back leg in zenkutsu dachi. Therefore a lot of speed and power can be generated when moving forward.

From hanme to shomen it is important to use the back leg to push the body directly forward in a linear motion. Any rounded movement with the arms or legs will only act to slow you down.

At the half-way point it is obviously important to keep the same height, however, equally important is to keep your weight on your supporting leg (jiku ashi) for as long as possible, whilst moving forward into stance. So many students allow their weight to move too far forward, and then pull it back when they execute the block.

When you execute a technique, whether a block, strike or punch, all the power must go forward aswell, not forward, only to be pulled back on the moment of kime. To do this it is important to keep your left knee and both hips pointing forward for as long as possible, whilst the right leg is moving forward into

position. This can only be done by keeping you weight on your left leg. This position should be held until the moment of kime, depending on the flexibility of your ankles. Then on the moment of kime you should push your right hip forward (aswell as the 30% weight), with your hand technique to complete the movement.

On no account should you feel that your weight moves forward as your right leg goes out, only to be pulled back at the moment of kime.

Of course moving back is of equal importance, but students often find it awkward and slow to pull the front leg backwards. However, this is because it 'IS' awkward and slow to pull the leg back. Therefore, we should use the front leg, which should always be slightly bent, to push back, creating enough momentum to allow the front hip to pull back, taking the front leg the remainder of the way. Doing it this way there is no need to have to lean forward, putting weight on the front leg in order to get enough power to push yourself back to the half way position.

Once at the half way position, moving into stance, again, should be as linear as possible. Allow the back leg to move straight back, and the moment it touches the ground pull the back hip back, rotating around the front hip, and complete the

stance, ensuring the back knee is not pulled too much back, and the shoulder, hip, knee and heel line is maintained. Once these points have been practiced it is possible to learn how to use kokutsu dachi effectively and incorporate it into your arsenal of techniques.

Kokutsu dachi is great for teaching students how to generate movement and power by the contraction and expansion of the hips. However, we will never gain anything from kokutsu dachi unless we learn the basic body mechanics first.

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