

Celebration of the Kwanmukan

By Patrick M. Hickey



The purpose of the Kwanmukan Anderson Cup is to “Celebrate” the Kwanmukan by recognizing those who best exemplify the Kwanmukan approach and technique as viewed by the founder Hanshi George E.

Anderson. Kwanmukan is greatly influenced by root technique that is common to all forms of martial arts. It is what Kwanmukan stands for and is expressed through strong, consistent, internal standards quantifiable, integrated and related.

What are those values of martial arts practice that Hanshi Anderson has been inspiring to instill in his students? The most important point is a calm mind. A calm mind focuses on what is happening without outside interference. This is essentially the concept of zanshin. Through keeping the mind calm, the body is calmed and does not interfere with the expression of salubrious¹ technique. Techniques without any excess motion are kinetically correct and performed point to point with nothing wasted, nothing withheld.²

Body Dynamics is simply the use of kinetics (body mechanics).³ Kinetics is the study of the forces that instigate, arrest, or modify the motion of the body. Newton's first and third laws of motion are especially applicable to kinetics. Newton's first law states that a body at rest stays at rest and a body in motion stays in motion unless acted on by an outside or unbalancing force. Newton's third law states that every action force has a reaction force that is equal in magnitude but opposite in direction. These two laws apply to the forces produced by muscles and act on the joints to create movement. The reaction forces of the muscles contribute to body equilibrium and the salubrious motion of the body.



Many things can prevent the most efficient and maximum creation of kinetic energy by the body. If the base or stance is not correct, that is, it is structurally unsound, energy will leak. A simple leaning of the head will pull the body out of equilibrium as will poor posture. Often times the visual error is only the symptom of the underlying fault. The root cause of the fault is most often not the visual anomaly but was created by an earlier imbalance in kinetic energy caused by incorrect body mechanics.⁴

Contra body action is often overlooked in the martial arts and this is a natural application of the laws of motion. Understanding how the body creates equilibrium internally through contra body action is the difference between high level and low level technique. Allow your body to move naturally and do not artificially force or

Keys to Good Technique

1. Pure line of action clearly established with nothing wasted, nothing withheld
2. The line of action and direction of technique coincide
1. Base correct with stance structurally/physiologically sound
2. Balance – weight set and stable
3. Correct posture maintained throughout
4. Movement generated using the correct body parts in an efficient manner and in the correct order
5. Weight placed over the foot with weight transfer according to the stance
6. Flow movement using correct stances, coordinated with appropriate gaze, breathing and rhythm
7. Coordinate the hands, feet, eyes, breath, and weight flowing as one
8. Complete each movement fully before start of next one
9. Gaze in the direction of the intended movement
10. Engage the body and mind fully in each action
11. Use correct triangular shape when kicking - head over the standing leg with hips extended.
12. Fully pivot the round and sidekicks avoiding contortion of the body

cut off movement. Otherwise movement will become stilted and unnatural.

General Consideration

Performance should concentrate on the underlying expression of technique. If you do not pay attention to the underlying action, you will be drawn to the flash and not the real action.⁵ To perform correctly, consider how each movement is set up and executed, how the body is structurally positioned at the completion of the movement, and finally be able to consistently repeat the movement in different directions.⁶

Fundamental Kwanmukan Consideration

There should be a calm mind with techniques point to point, nothing wasted, nothing withheld. The body and mind should be fully engaged and hand, foot, breath, eye and weight should all be completed at one time. There should be a balanced performance with a clear distinction between the different techniques. This is especially important in the kwanbu where techniques should be equal on both sides of the body. It is not the speed that counts but the underlying skill.

Kwanbu

In kwanbu, the most important aspects are consistent with those found in kata. However, there are some basic considerations that are given more weight than in kata. Kwanbu is the presentation of



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the basic technique (kihon) of the performer and the uniqueness of Kwanmukan. As each combination is performed, the setup of the movement and the execution of the movement are essential. That is, how the performer enters into a stance, the exchange between stances, and how the performer handles changes in the direction of movement, show the capacity of the performer. Kwanbu should be equitably balanced on both sides of the body. That is the combination should be consistently performed on both sides of the execution and not just equilibrium.^{7,8}

*Kata*⁹

Kata is the tool we use to teach our bodies how to generate power and to send that power to a particular place at a particular point in time. In this sense, we can say that karate is the creation by our body of maximum energy in an efficient, kinetically correct and salubrious manner and the directing of that energy to a particular place at a particular point in time¹⁰. Performance is done with a calm uninterrupted mind with nothing wasted and nothing withheld. Movement should not be stilted or stiff, but flow in a natural way. The body should be fully engaged in the action, in perfect kinetic balance, and there should be full completion of each action.¹¹ All of this is carried forward throughout the entire performance.

Embussen

The embussen (line of the kata) should be followed with no drifting. Drifting is usually caused by imbalance or misunderstanding of body kinetics. Most kata start and stop at the same spot and thus angles of movement and length of stride need to be studied to allow this to occur naturally.



WHAT IS CORRECT KIHON?

Correct kihon follows certain general rules that may be modified for special techniques. Foremost is stable mental attitude and strong mental energy (ki). This is expressed with stances that use the total surface of the foot (toe and heel) to grip the floor. Fully placing the weight over the foot in a stance will press the toes into the floor making this a natural way of standing. Knees and ankles are bent correctly depending on the purpose of the movement. Posture is natural with the neckline straight, shoulders down and no sway back. The upper carriage is lifted fully off the trunk. Except for special techniques, the axis of the body is perpendicular to the floor. Eyes gaze straight to the opponent with line of site parallel to the floor and there is a minimum of blinking – only enough to naturally keep the eyes from drying up.

Body dynamics have to be correct and use the expansion and contraction of the body to produce power with all components of the body working together to transmit force. The power generated should be transmitted smoothly in a clear line to the intended target. Body movements are correctly timed and matched to the purpose and direction of technique and coordinated with power generation. Maximum force should be delivered to a specific target in the shortest possible time. Breathing should be natural and match with the body movement.

The fight should be real and meaningful with intention in the techniques. As in Kumite, a worthless technique is a worthless technique.

Stance/Base

A correct stance or base is structurally sound/physiologically correct. There should be good posture and the weight transferred fully according to the stance. Take care to not lean into any stance, but allow the weight to roll fully through the foot to the toes such that the toes press into the ground. Thus in a front stance, the step moving forward should be heel to toe with the weight rolling through the foot

until the toes press into the floor. When the weight is suppose to be over the front foot, the weight is suppose to be over the foot and not leaning into the front foot by using the leg as a pole to lean into. Make sure you do not lean into the front or back leg. Pressure into a foot does not necessarily mean the weight is fully transferred over that foot.¹² Solid front and back stances with correct weight placement will eliminate knee collapse and wobbling while performing technique.

Movement

The rules of movement require that the body orient to the desired direction of travel, move in that direction, and the weight fully and naturally transports through the feet. Motion is generated by correct body mechanics in such a manner that there is a clear line of movement, and the line of movement and the direction of the technique (angle of attack) coincide. Thus the line of force is clearly established. To accomplish this, the weight should be placed over the supporting foot (feet), and a complete transfer of the weight occurs so that the weight is set on the supporting foot and not leaning into the supporting foot. Done correctly there

Ten Aspects of Performance

1. Rules of Movement followed
2. Driving leg moves passive leg
3. Complete weight transfer
4. Posture - straight back and level shoulders, where appropriate (most of the time).
5. Clear demonstration of power in techniques, not just arm or leg action.
6. Consistency in application of techniques
7. Comfortable with movement and techniques
8. Conservation of energy in movement and application using contra body action
9. No "extra" actions when executing techniques.
10. Correct Gaze

For the Novice

- Use Speed and power
- Look before turning
- Keep the hips horizontal especially while turning
- Use the correct or appropriate technique
- Show a strong spirit
- Move completely through the stance
- Put weight over the appropriate foot
- Make sure the eyes look forward
- Do not rise up and down unless it is appropriate
- Do not let the legs wobble or collapse
- Symmetry when symmetry is called for
- Show that you have been practicing



should be a smooth line of action where the various aspects of the body come together at one time – hand, foot, eye, breath, and weight displacement all end in unison.¹³

Clear motion should have a definitive active or driving leg and a passive leg. The driving leg moves the passive leg and the passive leg should respond naturally to the forces created, not artificially controlled. If the passive leg is activated, this causes an interruption in the line of action and thus an imbalance. Movement must occur in a manner that is structurally sound, not debilitating to the body, and is conducive to the health and well being of the body.

Balance/Equilibrium

Balance is considered two ways. First there is the balance of the movements to both the left and right directions. We can also consider whether the body is in balance while in dynamic motion and while standing still. In considering balance in motion or at the completion of the movement, certain things can cause the movement to be out of balance. The gaze could be incorrect and if the head is leaning, even if simply by looking at the floor, the stance can be pulled out of balance. Head weight, if not centered over the base is a common problem of balance loss. Each movement is completed before the start of another. Each movement must be completed before the start of the next. In kicking, allowing one hip to be out of line in a front kick will cause the weight to be off the base. Leaning incorrectly while kicking is a common cause of off-balance.¹⁴

Completion of techniques

Proper movement is affected and the body out of balance if the performer does not finish one movement before the start of next one. Each movement should be completed before the start of the next one, however, the expression of the movement does not complete at the end of the singular action but continues fully until the completion of the entire sequence. Then the direction change

can begin. Thus, make sure each technique is completed before moving into the next one, even when techniques are performed one immediately after the other. It is better to take the time to complete a technique then perform really fast and slur or smear your actions with little or no clear distinction of technique. Ultimately, completely finishing each movement will be faster and more effective. This applies to completion of stance as well.

Breathing

Breath is synchronous with movement and is not held. The breathing pattern employed should be naturally consistent with the rhythm being used by the performer. Undue tension (that can be caused by incorrectly breathing) will impact performance in a varied of ways. How rhythm (tempo, beat, and accent) is employed affects the breathing pattern used. This can and should be different for each performer.

Gaze

In most instances your eyes precede your technique and look in the direction of movement. The line of sight should reflect the application of technique. Do not look at the ground unless you are applying a technique in that direction as leaning the head will pull the stance out of balance. Improper gaze results in loss of balance negatively affecting movement.

Convergence

All movements (big/small, body/hand/foot, loco motor/percussive) need to converge at the same time (kime). Continue movement until the completion of the combination and direction of the movement (along the embussen.) Step correctly, transferring weight properly, and breathe with performance. Set your line of movement in the kata and follow along that line until the movement is completed before going another direction.

Five Elements of Kata

- Shin, which is imperturbable mental control
- Ki, which is the mental energy is extended outward to infinity
- Ryoku, where the techniques which are focused and supporter throughout the body
- Smoothness in continuation of the movements
- Proper rhythm of the movements.



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Main points to check in kata

- Did the performer understand the application of the technique?
- Did the performer maintain concentration on the objective of the technique?
- Was the center of gravity centered in the body?
- In general, did the hara maintain a level movement?
- Were the eyes gazing in the direction of the technique especially at the point of kime, head level?
- Was the new direction of movement set and followed – eyes first establishing the direction of movement after completion of the prior technique then the body set to move in that direction?
- Was the energy at the end of a technique used to begin a new technique – especially where expansion and contraction of the body comes into play.
- Are the muscles relaxed between technique allowing the body to move smoothly and naturally?
- Did the tempo and rhythm of the kata match the application of the movement?
- Was breathing paced to the tempo of the kata?
- Did all movement and resulting technique stay true to the embusen of the kata?

Advanced Performance Considerations

- Did the performer bring out the unique aspect of Kwanmukan
- Was the performer able to match to kata to their body style?
- Was maximum use made of the expansion and contraction of the body to create and expel power?
- Was the purpose of each movement demonstrated in addition to application in a manner that represents a reasonable bunkai
- Was the timing of the movement based on the perceived application of the technique?
- Did breathing occur consistent with the visualization of the application and was muscle movement/body movement consistent with the breathing in the kata.
- Are moves independent when they should be and together (or flowing) when they should be?

Ten Considerations for Kwanbu

1. Movement set up correctly
2. Smooth line of movement
3. Stances in equilibrium
4. Balanced presentation with equal techniques in all directions
5. Stance changes correct turning with no loss of balance
6. Weight over the foot and no leaning in stances
7. Full completion of each technique
8. Clear the difference between techniques
9. Concentration does not falter at the end of each combination.
10. Underlying skill, not just speed



Endnotes

- ¹ Salubrious means favorable to or promoting health and welfare of the body. Technique should be such that it is not debilitating to the body and move in a smooth natural way.
- ² In this sense, we are considering a minimalist approach to the performance of technique with no wasted action.
- ³ Proper body movement prevents and corrects posture problems, reduces stress and enhances physical capabilities.
- ⁴ There are a myriad of things that can go wrong with karate motion and every error can be traced back to incorrect kinetics. Improper technique, fatigue, or loss of mental concentration will cause the body to consciously or unconsciously error and kinetics will try to correct the imbalance according to Newton's third law of motion. What you see on the outside will most likely not be the actual mistake, but the corrective adjustment to the actual error.
- ⁵ It is important to observe more than just what the hand or foot is doing. Such movement can be flashy and detract the eye from following the underlying movement. The judge must ignore the flash and go to the root action. Otherwise, your eyes will betray you.
- ⁶ Judges, during the performance, look for the more difficult movements as they occur. You know the forms and should know which parts are more difficult – both athletically and technically. Keep alert and observe those portions of the form. Some allowance may be given for difficulty factors, however difficult movements incorrectly performed should not be weighed more heavily over correct kihon execution.
- ⁷ Equilibrium is important in the changing of direction, smooth line of action and completion of technique. Equilibrium and balanced action refer to separate concepts.
- ⁸ In younger divisions there should be correct movement with good posture. Can the performer send their bodies where they are suppose to go?
- ⁹ We have not defined the exact performance of the Kwan Mu or Kwan Kong Cheung Kwan Kata. Each dojo has solved some of the problems presented in the form in a different way and each performer is allowed to bring their personality and spirit to the form. This being said, acceptable variations of the kata are permitted as various schools have adopted different renditions of the kata. However, the specific variation as performed must express or convey the meaning behind the variation.
- ¹⁰ This is also a definition of kumite.
- ¹¹ An insipid technique is an insipid technique. Performance should not be insipid but exciting, stimulating, and interesting.
- ¹² We talk about not bobbing up and down when moving. This can be controlled through natural movement. If the weight is set on the supporting foot (body is not leaning into that foot), movement starts with the weight-bearing leg (leg with most of the weight on it.) If the movement starts with what should be the non weight-bearing leg (leg with least of the weight on it) the movement starts by pushing off that foot. In the case of stepping forward, if the weight is not over the front foot, the ball of the back foot presses down and the heel is lifted as weight is transferred forward. This causes a natural offsetting rise in the body (see Newton's Laws of Motion). This is especially noticeable in moving into and out of a front stance.
- ¹³ Also in this regard, there is a tendency to use the bones to hold weight and not the muscle. While bone support to hold weight is appropriate for some actions, for dynamic karate action the muscles should be trained to hold the weight allowing the muscles of the body to be ready to react as needed.
- ¹⁴ The round and sidekicks should be fully pivoted, and the hip forward of the standing leg. This allows a triangular shape between the head, supporting foot and hips. Should the head be behind the supporting leg, power is displaced backwards. Fully pivoted kicks are clearly more difficult than other kicks.