

BASIC TECHNIQUES

Methods of gripping the *shuriken*

Bo shuriken

Both Negishi Ryu and Shirai Ryu hold the blade in the same way, with a few variations depending upon the type of blade, and other schools follow suit, with a few variations of their own. It is held in the hand by forming a guide with the 1st, 2nd and 3rd fingers. The little finger gives extra support and the thumb holds the blade in place. The feeling of the hand when holding and throwing is said to be gentle, like holding a swallows egg so as not to break it. (see *fig. 1*).

Shirai Ryu

In Shirai Ryu, the blade is held with the point outwards towards the target, or inwards to the palm, depending upon the distance to be thrown.

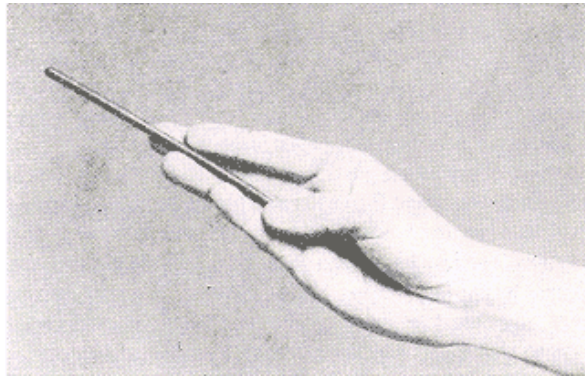


Figure 1. Holding the *shuriken* of the Shirai Ryu

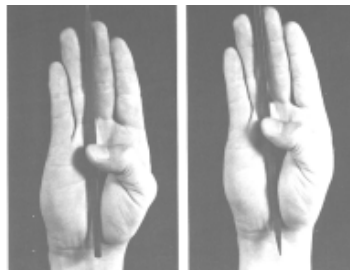


Fig 2. A variation in the hold of Shirai Ryu, for long blades. (Used with permission, © Robert C. Gruzanski)

Gripping the blade in Negishi Ryu

In Negishi Ryu, the blade is always held with the tip pointing forwards, and much like the method of Shirai Ryu, it is held in the hand with the fingers acting as a guide, and the thumb locks it in place. (see *fig. 2*)

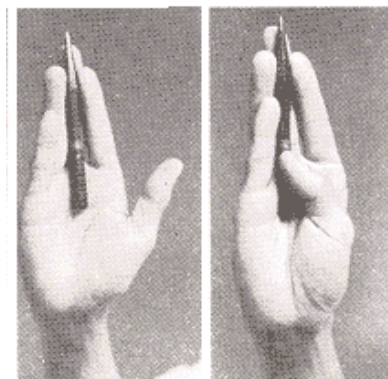


Figure 3. Holding the *shuriken* of the Negishi Ryu

The *Jikishin* grip

Not much is known about *Jikishin*, and it is suspected that this is a variation in style of a precursor to Shirai or Negishi Ryu. Kashima Shinto Ryu has a particular method of throwing the *shuriken* with a step of the right foot forwards and a rapid raise and drop of the right arm for the throw, and as the *Jikishin* method involves the same specific method, it is possible that Kashima Shinto Ryu has in fact preserved the *jikishin* throw. The major difference to the above throws is in the way the blade is held (see fig 4). The 3 smaller fingers are curled, while the index finger points out straight, as though making a gun shape with the hand. The blade sits with its butt in the palm and the thumb applies slight pressure from above, downwards, holding it in place on the side of the curled middle finger, and holding the tail down as it leaves the hand. The index finger then rests on the side of the blade, providing support. The throw is a simple raising and lowering of the arm from the side as a step is taken forward, the arm cuts down as if it were a sword.

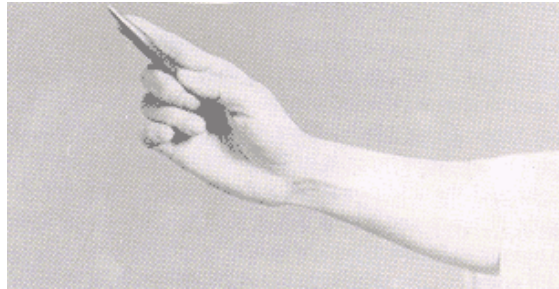


Figure 4. Holding the *shuriken* in the *Jikishin* grip

The grip of "*kanime*"



Figure 5. Gripping the *shuriken* in preparation for "*kanime*"

"Chinese Fist Method" *Chugoku Genho* 中国拳法

This method of holding and throwing a blade is mentioned in Douglas Hsieh's "Ancient Chinese Hidden Weapons", which appears to be run by a practitioner of the Ninjutsu arts. It appears this method of holding and throwing is peculiar to Teihozan Ryu, and/or Mou En Ryu (said to have originated in China), yet this is to be confirmed. In the Chinese arts, a blade of 9-12 cms is used, but the Japanese arts which utilise this type of throw use a longer blade.

The butt end of the blade is placed in the centre of the palm, which pushes the blade out through the fingers on the throw. The thumb, index, middle and ring fingertips clutch the sides of the blade, forming a kind guide through which the blade exits. The hand flicks forward to the target. There are two methods of throwing, called "positive" and "negative" hand, where the hand is either held in a low position with the palm upwards and throws at targets at above horizontal, or held in a high position with the palm downwards, throwing at targets below horizontal. The "negative" hand (shown in fig. 6 below), is regarded as a "*metsubushi*" (sight remover) attack, as it targets the eyes. The path of the blade, as it leaves the hand is direct, or straight, thus creating a very small profile as it could only be seen from in front of the tip. This makes it difficult to see, as opposed to the Shirai or Negishi Ryu basic throws where the blade is thrown from above the head like a sword cut, therefore making it an ideal *metsubushi waza*. It is interesting to note that film footage of the late Isamu Maeda Sensei of Negishi Ryu, senior of Satoshi Saito Sensei, who appeared in the NHK documentary on Negishi Ryu shuriken jutsu featuring Yoshinori Kono Sensei, shows him distinctly throwing blades in this "Chinese Fist" method.



Figure 6. Holding a *shuriken* in the "Chinese Fist" method

Concealing blades in the hand

As mentioned previously, part of the tactical advantage of the *shuriken* is its small size and unobtrusive shape, meaning that it can be concealed quite easily, not only on the body for carrying, but also within the hand as a surprise tactic before throwing in battle. Opponents

make a visual judgement of each other before engaging, and the tactics one uses are based upon what one is able to perceive. *Shuriken* can be quickly drawn and deployed, and this surprise change to the battle situation could gain one a valuable few seconds advantage in timing, and thus swing the balance of power in an altercation. This idea follows the fundamental principle of Sun Tzu's Art of War, that of "deceit"; ie. "Attack the enemy where he least expected and prepared" (Chapter 1. V4.)

The hands are very expressive parts of the body, they are used in many human activities, and the shape and movement of the hands can often unconsciously betray our intentions. Experiments have shown that an observer relies heavily on the shape and position of the hands in relation to each other and the body when trying to determine the intended activity of a subject. These same experiments have also shown that covering the back of the hand and fingers with a flat, dark material not only masks the shape of the hands, but also makes it difficult for the observer to recognise what a person is doing.



When we carry objects in the hand, our hand naturally takes a shape and position about the body that we can readily recognise as being the shape used for carrying. The fingers close into a fist, the skin goes a bit whiter than the rest of the parts of the body, due to the constriction of blood from tightening the muscles that are doing the holding. In this way we can see how the body can betray our intentions.

When the arm hangs by the sides of the body without carrying anything, the muscles are relaxed, the fingers loose and open, and there is no whitening of the skin. In order to carry something in the hand without giving anything away, one must project the illusion that the hand is empty, using these small facts we know about the way we unconsciously do things.



Example 1a



Example 2a



Example 3a

In the 3 examples above, the hand shapes and position do not give away the fact that a potentially dangerous weapon is being carried, however, in the 3 examples below, the hand is turned to reveal the weapon and the method of holding it.



Example 1b

Example 2b

Example 3b

In the immediacy of an engagement at battle, we need to make quick decisions based on what we immediately perceive, and when situations are changing rapidly, we don't have as much time to think or rationalise, so we rely more on signals given by our subconscious. Our body follows familiar paths of perception, judgement, decision and action, that is, under stress we act more on instinct or unconscious signals than through carefully thought out decisions. Much like a magician performing sleight of hand, we can hide a *shuriken* in plain view, thus giving us a tactical advantage over an opponent.

Hira shuriken, or shaken

The star and cross shaped shuriken, known as *hira shuriken*, or *shaken*, use an entirely different principle in flight than do the *bo shuriken*, as they spin at a rapid rate, and have multiple points which can make contact with the target. There seems to be some dispute over the method of throwing. Dr Hatsumi, current Head Master, or 34th *soke* of Togakure Ryu Ninjutsu, shows throwing the *shuriken* as one would throw a small "frisbee", that is, the blade is held horizontally, parallel to the ground, between the thumb and first finger. The wrist makes a flicking action forward as the arm straightens out in front of the thrower's stomach. Several shuriken are held cupped in the left hand like a stack of coins, and are passed to the right hand in rapid succession. Shirakami Eizo however, states that this method is wrong, and that the blade is held and thrown vertically, in much the same way as a *bo shuriken*. (see fig. 5, below)

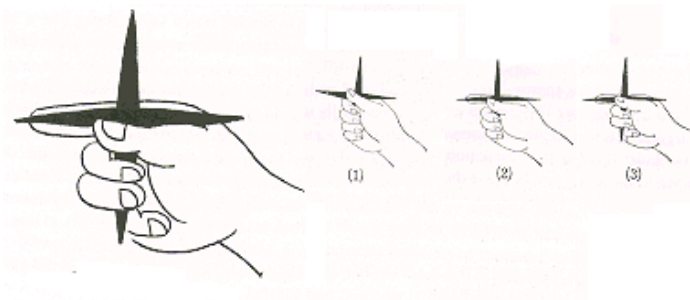


Figure 5. Holding a *hira shuriken* of the Ninjutsu schools. (1) shows an incorrect method

Both types of throw are feasible, however, the latter method can generate much more power.



Figure 6. Note that the thumb grips the centre of the blade, holding the blade firmly against the forefinger. This ensures that the blade remains under control during the throw, thus removing another possible variable from the blade's travel to the target.

Throwing *Shaken*

As mentioned in the introduction, there are two reported methods of throwing *shaken*. I haven't had any instruction in throwing the way Hatsumi Sensei described, that being from horizontal, so I won't discuss that method. The throw of the other method, holding the *shaken* vertically, is similar to the throw with *bo shuriken*, it is an over-head throw, where the arm moves in a vertical downwards and forwards movement. It is important that the *shaken* is thrown perpendicular to the ground, and to the target. If it leans over in the throw, air resistance will create an aerodynamic effect against the blade, and it will curl off and raise slightly in its path off target. Even if the *shaken* is held upright, but is turned sideways in the throw, that is, not in line with the flat plane between thrower and target, air resistance created by its forward movement will cause the blade to angle off line and drop quickly. (refer to diagram)

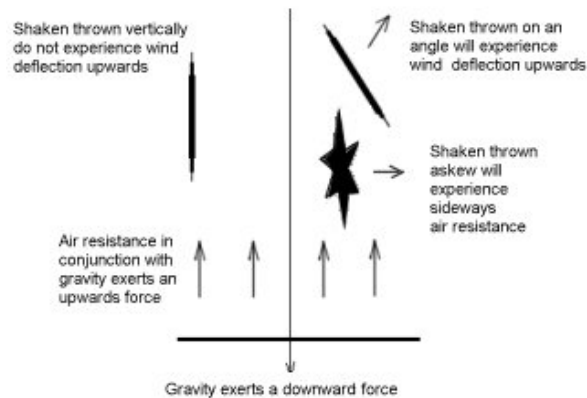


Figure 7..

Only when the blade is vertical, and perfectly aligned with the line of throw to the target, will you be able to control the throw with any degree of accuracy.

Another cause for inaccuracy with *shaken* is an asymmetry between the two sides of the blade itself. *Shaken* have sharpened edges that are sloped much the same way as a knife blade. If the amount of surface area on the sloped edges of each side of the blade are not equal, then there will also be an aerodynamic effect when the blade is thrown.

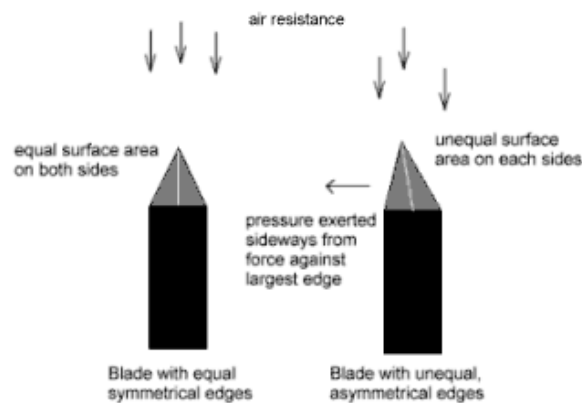


Figure 8.

So if your blade seems to veer off from straight, even though you are sure of holding it vertically to the ground, and perpendicularly to the target, the next thing to do would be to carefully check the edges of the blade for symmetry.