



INTERNATIONAL KARATE DAIGAKU

**SHICHIDAN EXAMINATION REPORT
USHIRO-GERI-KEKOMI**

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MAY 2017**

Summary

This report is about ushiro-geri-kekomi, a linear kick that is used in Shotokan karate, both in the traditional martial art, and in sports (competition) training. First, I will introduce a few general aspects of karate training, and focus on two important points when working on leg techniques. I will then discuss how to prepare and develop ushiro-geri-kekomi through specific exercises, educational drills, and the various steps involved in executing this kick. I will also describe ushiro-geri-kekomi training as such, with respect to striking surfaces and targets, as well as the range and advantages of the technique in sparring. The report will conclude with important points to remember and errors to avoid.

Acknowledgements

Testing for a seventh dan requires a countless number of hours dedicated to training. And it takes many years to get there. During that journey, we cross paths with many people who guide and help us along the way. For me, the following people were key figures in my development. To that end, I would like to thank my first instructor at Cégep de Sainte-Foy, Mr. Camil Boulay, my second instructor, **Mr. Roger Massicotte**, who guided me until my third dan, and then **Sensei James Field**, with whom I had a lot of fun training for many years. There are, of course, many other instructors that I trained with in various seminars in Canada, the United States and Europe.

Also of note are my generation's brothers in arms, Messrs. Bryan Mattias, Guy Bourgon and Claude Deschênes. Moreover, I cannot forget those who started karate at the same time as I did, and who are still active today, i.e. Messrs. Bernard Drolet, Omer Vilao, Gilles Richard and Guy Malenfant. I would also like to make a particular mention of a few special people, who were once young, i.e. Messrs. Danny Dickinson, Pierre Beaulieu, Georges-André Bernatchez, Van Diep Doan and Simon Angers. I had a lot of fun with those guys. There are obviously all my students who have been training with me for many years. They have had a positive influence on me, always pushing me to go further.

Finally, I would like to thank Mrs Carmen Bernleithner, for helping me for the english version of my paper and Mr. Denis Pelletier, who has done a tremendous job in taking photos and who has helped in the layout of my work. A well-illustrated document makes for an interesting read.

Thank you to each and every one of you.

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USHIRO-GERI-KEKOMI

1 Introduction

Shotokan karate as we practice, it's a martial art based on the use of all weapons of the human body. These weapons are mainly the arms and legs. In general, using the lower extremities is more demanding and strenuous than using the upper limbs. However, for good balance, any karate practitioner should develop both equally. Personally, I like working on leg techniques, which is why I chose to write this paper about *ushiro-geri-kekomi*¹. I have selected this technique, because I like to perform it and I especially like to combine with mawashi-geri. Also, this is good to practice this kick, because it creates a good balance with mae-geri, as it is mentioned in the book of Sensei Stan Schmidt, Meeting Myself². I have realized after many years of practice, that ushiro-geri-kekomi is one of the most difficult kicking technique to perform. It is my hope, that this paper will help intermediates and advances karateka to improve this technique. In this study, I will discuss how I execute and teach this kick.

First, it should be specified that ushiro-geri-kekomi is a linear thrusting kick. **It combines the power of the hips rotation with the thrusting motion of the leg.** It can be aimed at any level (jodan: nose, jaw, throat; chudan: ribs, solar plexus, abdomen and gedan: groin, thigh and knee), although its use at the jodan level is risky. Flexibility in the pelvis and hips make it easier to learn and execute. As is the case for any kicks, the correct path and the correct use of the hips are essential to getting a strong and effective technique. It will, for that matter, determine the effectiveness of this kick.

My presentation covers six (6) areas:

- ***General aspects of karate training;***
- ***General aspects of leg techniques;***
- ***Preparing for ushiro-geri-kekomi;***
- ***Practicing ushiro-geri-kekomi;***
- ***Important points to remember;***
- ***Errors to avoid.***

¹ This kick can also be perform in keage motion (snapping kick) ushiro-geri-keage. I'm not talking about this kick in this paper.

² See the chapter 16, pp. 179 – 192.

2 General Aspects of Karate Training

In general, karate techniques owe their effectiveness to the transfer of kinetic energy at the moment of impact. **This energy transfer is maximized through proper technical training**, which is the principal strength of Shotokan karate. Each technique must thus travel along the **proper path, using great speed and maximum kime**. The path is either linear or circular, and proper muscle work is required to perfect it. As is the case for speed, the key element is to relax. Kime, which may be defined as the maximum amount of energy that can be produced, is the result of tensing all muscles in the body at once, for the shortest instant possible. To do this requires maximum energy, good spirit, and a high level of concentration. There are three major ways to generate kime in karate: vibration, rotation and translation. For all arm and leg techniques, the initial impulse is generated from the hara. It is then transmitted to the arms and fists for the upper extremities, and to the legs and feet for the lower limbs. The entire process is controlled by the musculoskeletal system.

3 General Aspects of Leg Techniques

Before I talk about ushiro-geri-kekomi as such, I would like to emphasize two important points about kicking techniques. Unlike arm techniques, which are executed with both feet on the ground, there is only one supporting leg when kicking. **So, the supporting leg must be firmly planted on the ground to maximize the effectiveness of the technique**. Also, the knee of the supporting leg must be bent to provide good balance at the moment of impact. This point is very important with ushiro-geri-kekomi, especially, if you are using this kick to stop someone attacking. The other important point is that with leg techniques, there is no concept of withdrawing the opposite leg, such as hikite with arm techniques. For example, when you punch oi-zuki with the right arm, there is an opposite action with the left arm. This is the action/reaction principle. These two points are fundamental and demonstrate the difficulty associated with practicing kicking techniques. The slightest error during their use can be fatal in sparring. This is one of the main reasons, why I use educational drills for kicking technique.

4 Preparing for Ushiro-geri-kekomi

Any physical activity, whether it is a sport such as running, swimming, cross-country skiing or a martial art such as karate, should begin with a proper warm-up. This should be a series of general exercises aimed at preparing the body for a more vigorous workout. **The warm-up is essential to karate, since movements are usually very abrupt**. It is all the more important when training in leg techniques, since the whole pelvic and lower back region are solicited to a considerable extent³. No matter which leg technique I teach, I start off with light jogging or light jumping jack to rise the body temperature. After that, I'm going with specific exercises for kicking, followed by educational drills, and finish off with the step-by-step execution of the kick.

³ It should be noted that 80% of the population complains of back pain at one time or another. This often results from inadequate preparation for the task to be performed.

4.1 Specific Exercises for Kicking

When we teach new techniques, especially those using the lower extremities, it is beneficial and educational to use specific exercises at the beginning. They prepare the body for the execution of the technique and make the learning process easier. This section shows specific exercises that can be used for any type of kicks. This is not an exhaustive list, but rather a sequence that I use when I teach kicks. The following exercises are:

- 1- Hip rotation (photo 1);
- 2- Torso twist (photo 2);
- 3- Lower back stretch (photo 3);
- 4- Pelvis stretch - 1 (photo 4);
- 5- Pelvis stretch - 2 (photo 5);
- 6- Quadriceps stretch (photo 6);
- 7- Buttock stretch (photo 7);
- 8- Ankle flex (photo 8);
- 9- Ankle stretch (photo 9).

The three first exercises: hip rotation, torso twist and lower back stretch, are set to prepare the lower back for executing any type of kick. They solicit various hips and lower back muscle groups at the same time.



Photo 1 Hip rotation



Photo 2 Torso twist



Photo 3 Lower back stretch

Pelvic stretches, photo 4 and 5, are important for the twisting motion of the hips, when we are executing kicks, like mawashi-geri, yoko-geri-kekomi and ushiro-geri-kekomi. They improve this step tremendously, which is crucial in executing ushiro-geri-kekomi. Once the twisting motion is set in ushiro-geri-kekomi, half of the work is done. The stretching of the pelvis at this step, is not to gain in flexibility, but just to set this part of the body for executing the technique⁴.



Photo 4 Pelvis stretch - 1



Photo 5 Pelvis stretch - 2

Setting the quadriceps (photo 6) and buttocks (photo 7), the sixth and seventh exercises in the sequence, requires proper preparation, since these are the driving muscles that initiate all kicks.



Photo 6 Quadriceps stretch



Photo 7 Buttock stretch

⁴ According to the recent research in sport training, we must avoid to use too much static stretching during the warm-up session. Thibault, Guy (2009 et 2013), Lussier Martin, Toussaint Pierre-Mary (2012).

These two ankle exercises are important and provide good elasticity and mobility to the ankles. Flexing is very beneficial when we are executing ushiro-geri-kekomi, because it's help to keep a good balance when turning and also, as we are hitting the target with the heel, it's required a good ankle flexibility. For the ankle stretch, this is less important for ushiro-geri-kekomi, but this is always good to work on it for the other kicks and also, as a complement for flex.



Photo 8 Ankle flex



Photo 9 Ankle stretch

This series of specific exercises is a good way of preparing the body for the second and third part of the training, namely educational drills and step-by-step execution of the kick.

4.2 Educational Drills

Educational drills include the three following steps: (1) bending the knee to improve balance, (2) bending the knee and look at the target, and (3) bending the knee, look at the target and extending the leg. When I'm teaching these drills, I'm using heisoku-dachi as starting position. It makes the drills easier to complete.

4.2.1 Bending the Knee to Improve Balance

As ushiro-geri-kekomi is one of the most difficult kick to perform, a good balance is required to do it with kime and precision. For the first step, the main point is to get a good sensation of balance on both feet (photo 10) and after that, put the whole weight on one feet and alternate from right side to left side (photos 11 and 12). This is a simple exercise, but helpful to work on balance, which is a vital point in all kicks.



Photo 10



photo 11



photo 12

Working on balance

4.2.2 Bending the Knee and Look at the Target

The second drill is also improving balance, but we add one of the key points concerning ushiro-geri-kekomi, look at the back to see the target (photos 13 to 15). When we are performing this kick, for a short instant, we are turning our back to the opponent. This instant must be the shortest possible. So, this is very important to see the target as quick as possible. I have observed after many years of teaching, that many students lost balance when they are performing this kick, because they are not looking quickly for the target.



Photo 13



Photo 14



Photo 15

Working on balance and look at the target

4.2.3 Bending the Knee, Look at the Back and Extending the Leg

The third and last drill combined the first and the second drill with the extension of the leg (photo 16). There is two main points with this drill : 1) working on the precision to reach the target and 2) thrusting the leg to generate the striking power.



Photo 16 Bending the knee, look at the target and extending the leg

These three drills, which I work on when I'm teaching ushiro-geri-kekomi are used to improve balance and also, prepare the leg to travel on the proper path. We might say that it is a way of educating the legs.

4.3 Step-by-Step Execution of the Kick

Since leg techniques are more difficult to perform than hand techniques, it is a good idea to teach them using many steps. For ushiro-geri-kekomi, at the beginning, I'm teaching it using kokutsu-dachi⁵. Using kokutsu-dachi, its very helpful to get a good balance. I set the kick with five different steps : (1) turn and look at the target, (2) extending the leg and hold on for 2 or 3 seconds, (3) bring back the leg and keep balance, (4) going down in zenkutsu and (5) returning in kokutsu-dachi.

4.3.1 Turn and Look at the Target

Starting from kokutsu-dachi (photo 17), we are rotating the hips quickly using the front leg as pivoting leg (photo 18). As we rotate, we have to look as fast as possible to see the target. This is one of the key point to keep our balance. At this point, the whole weight must be on one leg, the supporting leg. In this step, the body is upright and the knee of the supporting leg is bent to provide good balance.



Photo 17 Kokutsu



Photo 18 Look at the target

⁵ I have started using kokutsu-dachi for teaching this kicking technique, after reading the book of Sensei Stan Schmidt, Meeting myself. Ushiro-geri-kekomi was the subject for Sensei Schmidt seventh dan exam.

4.3.2 Extending the Leg

For this kick to be effective the twisting motion of the hips must be well set (photo 19) and the thrusting motion of the leg must be very quick (photo 20). When the thrusting motion is initiated, the leg must travel in straight line at maximum speed. The twisting and the thrusting motions are essential to get a good and strong ushiro-geri-kekomi. The striking power of this kick depends on the combination of these two motions. Upon impact, the striking foot must be almost perpendicular to the ground with a good tension in the ankle, the knee of the supporting leg must be bent, and the foot of the supporting leg must be firmly planted on the ground. Otherwise, the technique will be much weaker.



Photo 19 Look at the target



Photo 20 Extending the leg

4.3.3 Bring Back the Leg, Keep Balance and Going down to Zenkutsu

The foot must follow the same path on the return as it does for the kick and this must be **well controlled**. I'm always telling my students that they must control the return of their kicking foot. The kicking foot must never be dropped to the ground, regardless of the type of kick (photos 21 and 22).



Photo 21 Bring back the leg



Photo 22 Zenkutsu

5 Practicing Ushiro-geri-kekomi

Now that we have seen how to prepare our body for ushiro-geri-kekomi and the step-by-step execution of the kick, let us look at how to practice it. Although ushiro-geri-kekomi can be done from various starting positions (heisoku-dachi, hachinoji-dachi, heiko-dachi, kokutsu-dachi etc.), the most commonly used stance is zenkutsu-dachi. Mainly, in Shotokan karate, we are practicing ushiro-geri-kekomi starting from zenkutsu-dachi. However, it is good to practice also in kokutsu-dachi, to help for the balance and for the acceleration for the hips rotation.

To begin, the kick should be practiced slowly and completely, since this type of exercise provides the advantage of improving balance and increasing muscle tone in the legs. It is also a good idea to practice with a partner, to improve the precision of the kick and also to develop the sensation of hitting target. This will help to perfect the path of the technique. Also, practicing the kick with an elastic band is beneficial, especially for the thrusting motion, like we are doing with other kicks.

Ushiro-geri-kekomi is a kick with one mainly striking surface, **the heel**. We can use it on many different targets. It may be used at short, medium or long distance, and there are many advantages to using it in sparring. This kick is difficult to use at close distance, but we can do it.

5.1 Striking Surfaces and Targets for Ushiro-geri-kekomi

We use mainly the heel of the foot (kakato) as the striking surface. For the targets, there are many possibilities: face, neck, upper body, groin, legs and knees (photos 23 to 28), but the best one and the easy one is the upper body (solar plexus).



Photo 23 Face



Photo 24 Neck



Photo 25 Upper body



Photo 26 Groin



Photo 27 Legs



Photo 28 Knees

Ushiro-geri-kekomi is the strongest kicks in Shotokan karate, because of the amplitude of the hips rotation and the thrusting motion of the leg. It is therefore very important to exercise proper control when we are practicing with a partner. Regardless of the target you want to reach, the control must be perfect.

5.2 Distances for Ushiro-geri-kekomi

Since ushiro-geri-kekomi travels along a linear path, it is best used it at short, medium or long range. It also can be used at close range, but this is more difficult. In close range situations, it will be used if someone is on your back (photos 29 to 31). At short, medium or long range, in kumite, we are using the back leg.



Photos 29



Photo 30



Photo 31

Using Ushiro-geri-kekomi at close range

5.3 Advantages of Using Ushiro-geri-kekomi in Sparring

As ushiro-geri-kekomi is the strongest kick, a small person can use it advantageously against a larger or taller opponent at short, medium and long range. When we spar with a taller opponent, kicking with ushiro-geri-kekomi allows us to cover a longer distance and deliver a very strong kick. We can perform it alone or in combination with other techniques, like mawashi-geri.

As mentioned above, at medium or long range, it is better to combine ushiro-geri-kekomi with other techniques. These can be leg as well as hand techniques. Due to the hip extension, this kick provides greater reach than any other kicks. A few samples of combinations are shown below:

1) At short range, we can use ushiro-geri as a simple technique (photos 32 – 34 below).



Photo 32



Photo 33



Photo 34

2) At medium range, we combine ushiro-geri with other techniques (photos 35 – 37 below). (Kizami-mawashi-geri is used to facilitate the hips rotation for ushiro-geri).



Photo 35



Photo 36



Photo 37

3) At long range, like at medium range, we combine with other techniques (photos 38 – 43 below). (Mawashi-geri - ushiro-geri – uraken-uchi – oi-zuki).



Photo 38



Photo 39



Photo 40



Photo 41



Photo 42



Photo 43

We can do other combinations in sparring with ushiro-geri-kekomi, such as:

- Kizami-zuki-jodan — ushiro-geri-kekomi chudan;
- Kizami-kekomi chudan — ushiro-geri-kekomi chudan — gyaku-zuki;
- Yoko-geri-kekomi chudan — ushiro-geri — uraken-uchi-jodan — oi-zuki chudan.

There are several important points to remember when we practice ushiro-geri-kekomi. As mentioned in the previous sections, chambering the leg properly by raising the knee, bending the knee of the supporting leg, the foot of the supporting leg firmly planted on the ground upon impact, and so on. According to my experience, one of the most important points when executing ushiro-geri-kekomi, **is the twisting motion of the hips** (see photos 18, 19, 32 and 35). It will help to get the hips and the extending leg in same line (see photos 20, 36 and 40) and the kick will be stronger.

5.4 An Example of a Good Ushiro-geri-kekomi



6 Important Points to Remember

Important points to remember including the following:

- 1) The body should remain almost upright when turning;
- 2) When turning, look at the target as quickly as possible;
- 3) Proper hip twisting with thrusting motion of the leg;
- 4) The kicking leg must be almost in straight line with the supporting leg;
- 5) The shoulder and the arm of the kicking side must go in the same direction of the kick;
- 6) After executing the kick, bring the leg quickly;
- 7) The knee of the supporting leg should be bent;
- 8) The supporting foot should be firmly planted on the ground;
- 9) Upon impact, the striking part of the foot is the heel (kakato);
- 10) The return of the foot to the ground should be controlled.

7 Errors to Avoid

The most common errors that occur when practicing ushiro-geri-kekomi include:

- 1) Moving the upper body or arms when initiating the kick (signals to the opponent);
- 2) Look at the target too late (breaking balance);
- 3) Take too much time for turning (give the opportunity to the opponent to attack);
- 4) The knee of the supporting leg is straight rather than bent (breaking balance);
- 5) The heel of the supporting foot is raised when striking (breaking balance);
- 6) The striking foot is on the sokuto (reduces effectiveness);
- 7) The hips are not in line with the extending leg (reduces effectiveness);
- 8) The shoulder and the arm of the kicking side are going in the opposite direction of the kick (cannot see the target and reduce effectiveness).

8 Conclusion

In closing, it should be remembered that ushiro-geri-kekomi is a linear thrusting kick that combines the power of the twisting motion of the hips with the thrusting motion of the leg. To be effective, it must travel along the proper path using great speed and maximum kime. When executed, the knee of the supporting leg is bent, and the supporting foot is firmly planted on the ground. When it hits the target, the striking foot must be almost perpendicular to the ground and the ankle has to be tense to avoid injuries. It is a useful kick in sparring, since it can be aimed at different targets, close, short, medium and long range, and it can be combined with other arm and leg techniques.

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