

## Article on Mori-sensei's *sankaku gihō* approach

(*Hidden* magazine, June 2002 issue)\*

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### Preface

This is a partial translation of an article on the late Mori Dōki sensei and some of his teachings, that appeared in the Japanese magazine *Hidden* ['secret teachings'] earlier this year.

While preparing the text I received much help from Tameo Mizuno sensei and other Japanese kenshi in London, although no doubt I managed to sneak in various mistakes when they weren't looking. In this regard, I hope that the close replication here of the structure of the original article will encourage some bilingual readers to go through the two versions in parallel, and let me know about the biggest remaining blunders.

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Many principles in combination get results! Correct *shuhō* and polishing of *nuki waza* raise your techniques to the level of *sankaku gihō*.



Figure 1: As a fundamental element of *jūhō*, beginners first learn *kagi te shuhō*. *Kagi te* isn't just a matter of protecting the hand that has been grabbed, but has movements that embody *shuhō*'s underlying idea of always putting yourself in a position advantageous to that of the attacker.

Shorinjikempo *shuhō* focusses on bringing any grabbed part into close contact with your body, and thus being able to exert a greater force than the attacker. However, even within *kagi te shuhō*, which seems the most basic of the elements of *shuhō*, there are deeper underlying principles of how to make it work as a body-protecting posture. It's at this level that we find the entry point to Mori-sensei's *sankaku no ri*, an approach to gaining control over a human body.

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## The principles involved in *kagi te shuhō*

[first paragraphs summarised...]

All arts have their *kihon*, as I was reminded when I interviewed Mori-sensei for the February edition and was told about the *sankaku gihō* [triangle technique] that underlies *kagi te shuhō*.

The *kyōhan* says ‘Against an attacker who grabs your arm, if you bring that arm into contact with your body and bend it to a particular angle, even a small force becomes enough to resist the attacker’s strength.’

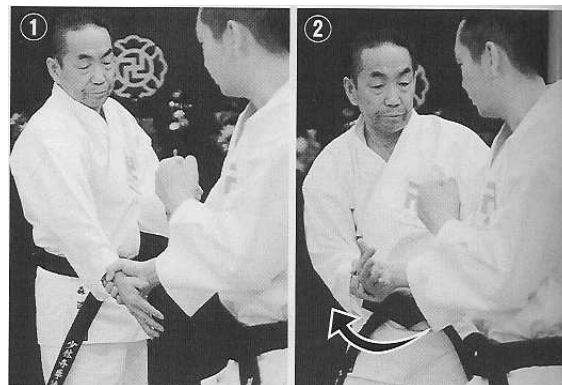


Figure 2: *kagi te shuhō* [‘right-angle protection method’]. Aiming to keep fixed in space the point that has been grabbed, step with *sashikae ashi* while bringing the hand to about one fist’s height above the elbow, and bring the elbow to the side of the body. When Mori-sensei is grabbed by the wrist he doesn’t draw it towards himself, but rather turns it lightly outwards while moving so as to maintain the distance between the wrist and his body. Nor does he strongly stretch out his fingers. Bending the arm to a right angle makes the upper arm effective as the application point for *teko no ri*.

So I asked Mori-sensei about the process involved in taking up *shuhō*, for example in response to a cross-hand grab.

‘There are many kinds of *shuhō* in Shorinjikempo. These include *kagi te shuhō*, *sankaku shuhō*, *tsuitate shuhō*, *konoha shuhō*, *chōji shuhō*, *kubi jime shuhō*, *hagai shuhō*, and *yahazu shuhō*.

‘Shorinjikempo as a religious practice sets as its goal the acquisition of strength for mental and spiritual development and the upholding of right behaviour. Therefore it isn’t fixated on how tough you are, or whether you can win battles, but needs some techniques so that even weak people can stand up to strong people. So you can’t rely on physical strength. The *shuhō* techniques are the first element – allowing you to protect your body. Basic though they are, they themselves are based on a lot of principles.

‘For example, when protecting yourself with *kagi te*, *kinkotsu no ri* comes into play, letting you use the attacker’s reaction against being pulled as a way to freeze his body position. And in moving into *kagi te* you can use *furiko no ri* – i.e., moving the grabbed part in a U-shaped curve rather than in a straight line, which would bring you into direct conflict with the attacker’s strength – to get your elbow to your side.

‘Then once you have your elbow in contact with your body, *teko no ri* [leverage] makes it easy for the natural movement of sinking your elbow to act in shifting the attacker’s weight off the ground. You could write a whole book about *shuhō*!

‘So in this case you can use various principles simultaneously to get the attacker’s weight onto one leg, and apply *kuruma no ri* (moving him with a smooth circular motion) and *hazumi no ri* (using rhythm and momentum), making it possible to throw him with just a tiny force.’

The *sankaku gihō* that is the topic of this article is a way of explaining one’s positioning relative to an attacker, allowing a more concrete and confident application of these various principles.



Figure 3: *furiko no ri* ['the pendulum principle']. Mori-sensei's comment: 'If your fingers are grabbed there's no point in just trying to raise the wrist; the attacker can bend his elbow to compensate, or can lock his arm (pictures 1 and 2). But if you swing the grabbed part using the attacker's shoulder as pivot (picture 3), his arm acts like the fixed-length string of a pendulum, swinging aside but letting you close in to an advantageous position.' As a way of maintaining constant separation while changing the direction of a force, *furiko no ri* is a crucial foundation of *sankaku gihō*.

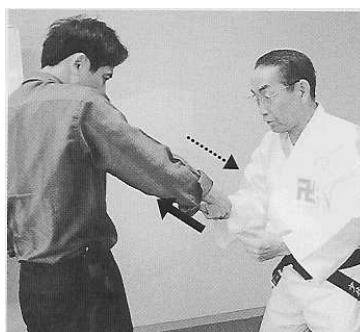


Figure 4: *kinkotsu no ri* ['principle of muscle and bone']. *Kinkotsu no ri* provides a basic way to freeze an attacker's posture. When you bend your elbow into a right angle, by reflex the attacker also locks his arm and shoulder to avoid being pulled. This gives you a momentary opportunity to push upwards through the attacker's shoulder and bring his entire weight off the ground. So rather than pulling forcibly, and without any change in position of the point that has been grabbed, you use elbow and shoulder movements to alter just the angle-of-effect of your strength.

### ***Sankaku gihō* for controlling an attacker with more compact movements**

Naturally as a beginner one uses *meuchi*, performs the *nuki* for each hand with large movements, then throws the attacker. However, if you know about *sankaku gihō* you can make the techniques smaller and apply them more rapidly.

In that sense, *sankaku gihō* could be said to be aimed at more advanced students.

*Sankaku gihō* clarifies the angles that make techniques work, thus letting you use *kagi te shuhō* itself to destabilise the attacker with less strength and smaller movements – bringing his weight up off the ground, and letting you apply the *kime* progressively to perform the throw.

'Of course at first you can't just rely on movements of the hand and forearm, but must make large movements of the entire body. These movements must be based on the body's centre line.

'As a beginner you may find you need to change the grip of your hands, and adjust the relative angle using *tai sabaki*, but once you understand *sankaku gihō* and become practised at it you'll be able to destabilise the attacker with quick movements, then throw him. However, if you keep focussing on movement of the forearm and the hand, you're bound to rely largely on strength; your techniques will never get to *kaisō*'s level where the effect is 'like being wrapped in silk' [mentioned in an earlier part of the interview].

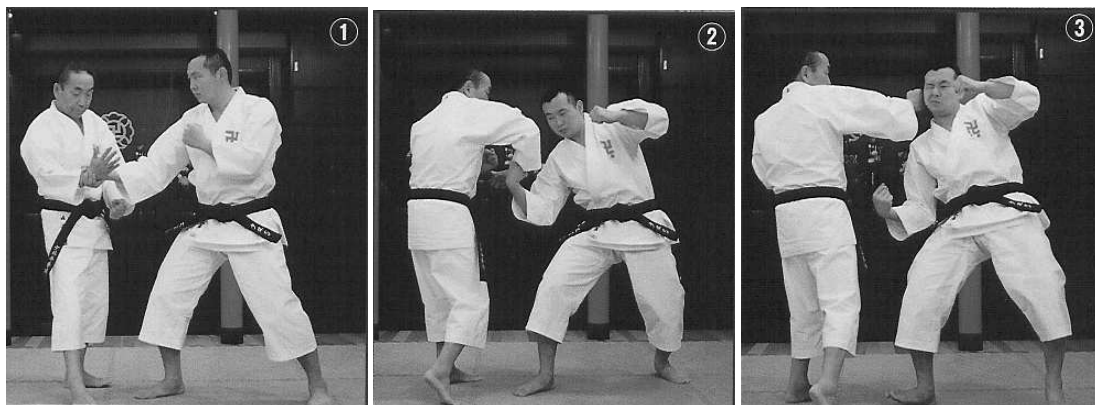


Figure 5: **Getting the feel, with *ryūō ken* 'kote nuki'.** The various *nuki waza* in *ryūō ken* all involve mastering an escape movement that doesn't budge the grabbed point – such as pushing the elbow forward, for a wrist grab. The pictures above show *kote nuki*, the basic form of which combines the *shuhō* with a *meuchi* to restrain the attacker. However, if the defender correctly uses *kinkotsu no ri* and *furiko no ri*, these alone will bring the attacker under control; thereafter the *nuki* movement itself will suppress further attacks and also destabilise the attacker, making counter-attacks doubly effective.

'In essence, *shuhō* is about making one's own position favourable to that of the attacker. In the case of an attacker grabbing your right hand with his, his left hand and both feet remain available for further attacks – or he could try a head-butt. If you just wait for such further attacks and deal with them one by one you'll probably come to grief at some point, which is why we train ourselves to put in *meuchi* while taking up *shuhō* to stop the attacker in his tracks, then use a *ryūō ken* technique to escape, and then perform a punch/kick *ren kō*.

'But once you come to understand *sankaku gihō* you'll be able to destabilise the attacker with the first part of your *shuhō* movement. This is obviously much faster.'

Indeed, when seeing Mori-sensei use *sankaku gihō* it seemed to be an instantaneous technique; the moment his wrist or whatever was grabbed, the attacker was already in the air.

And when I grabbed Mori-sensei's offered index finger, as soon as my grip closed I felt all my weight had been shifted onto one leg, my freedom of movement completely taken away.

'As I mentioned before, if you're grabbed right hand to right hand, at that moment both you and the attacker have free use of the other arm and of both legs. You have to create a situation in which you can keep his centre of gravity just where you want it, with him alone being unable to move or to make further attacks.

'To do this you must use effects such as freezing him up for an instant through *kinkotsu no ri*, so you can immobilise his feet and 'float' his weight. At this moment, the point on you that has been grabbed (in this case the right wrist) makes a triangle with the attacker's two feet. Destabilising the attacker by means of this triangle is *sankaku gihō*.

'Of course it's still important that up to *shodan* everyone still learn and repeatedly practice the sequence *shuhō, nuki, ren kō*.

'However – though it's an extreme way of looking at it – as a beginner you're in danger of the attacker being able to make follow-up attacks, and the way to deal with this is to train not just to respond rapidly, but paying due attention to *tai sabaki* such as *yose ashi*. Because that's how you can start to get a sense of the angle between you and the attacker, and correspondingly speed up your understanding of *sankaku gihō*.'

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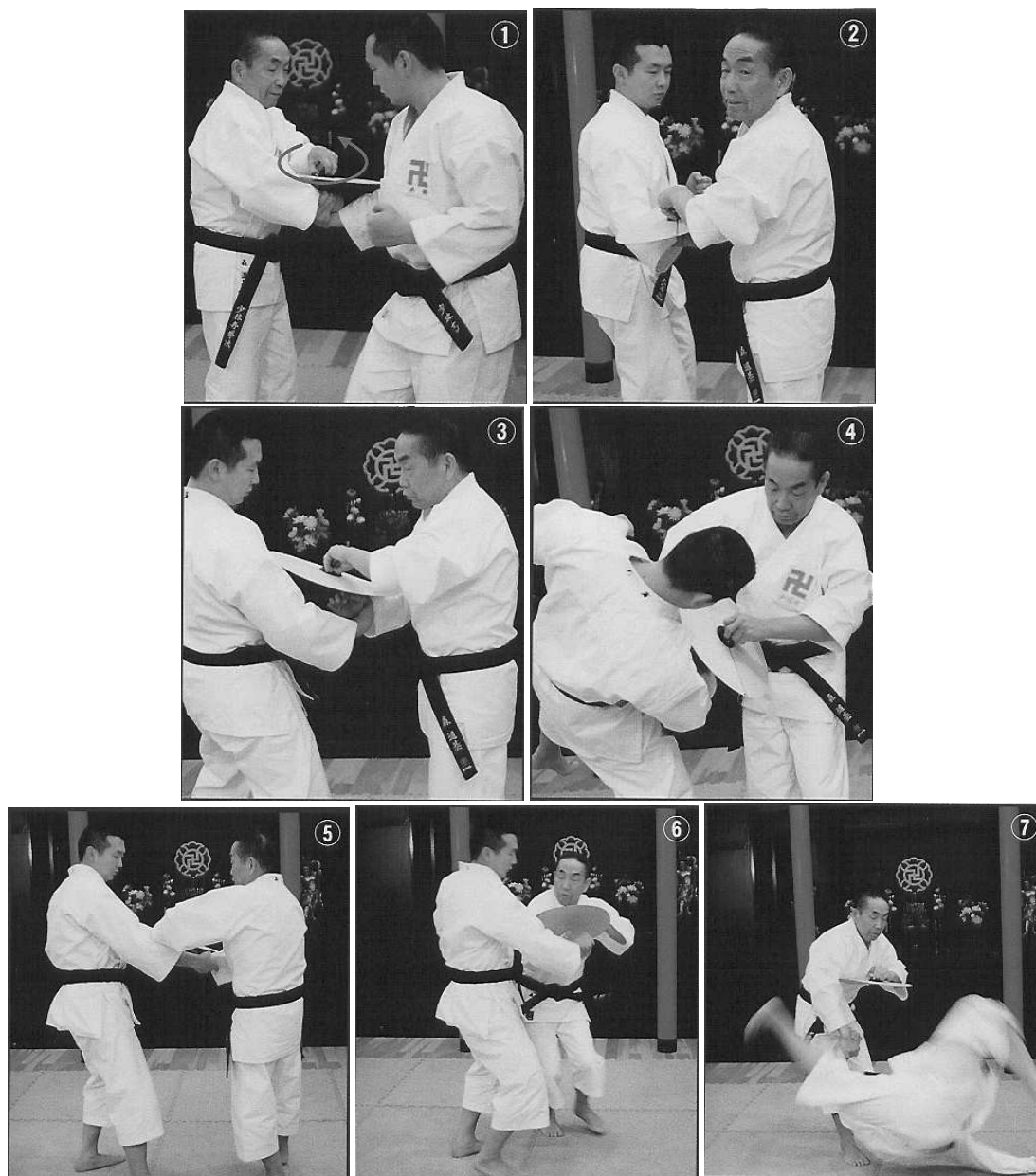


Figure 6: **The plane of circular movement must be tilted.** Maintaining space between a grabbed wrist and one's own body is a basic point of *kagi te*. Thereafter the aim is to destabilise the attacker by moving along a circular path with the wrist as its axis. However, if this path is in a horizontal plane then the attacker won't be pulled over – even if you grasp him with the other hand (pictures 1 and 2). The key is to tilt the plane, destabilising him by moving his centre of gravity to one leg or the other (pictures 3 and 4). For *ryūka ken*'s '*gyaku gote*' *nage waza*, by respecting this 'plane' the defender can move as if to pass shoulder-to-shoulder with the attacker, easily and smoothly throwing him (pictures 5 to 7).

Hearing how Shorinjikempo's teaching begins with *shuhō*, I was conscious of the truly systematic construction of the syllabus.

Some of the other forms of *shuhō* are listed above. For example, *sankaku shuhō* is used to respond to a double-handed grab to one arm with the aim of performing a hammer throw; it involves immediately bringing the palm of the grabbed hand to one's own waist. *Tsuitate shuhō* is for when an attacker holds

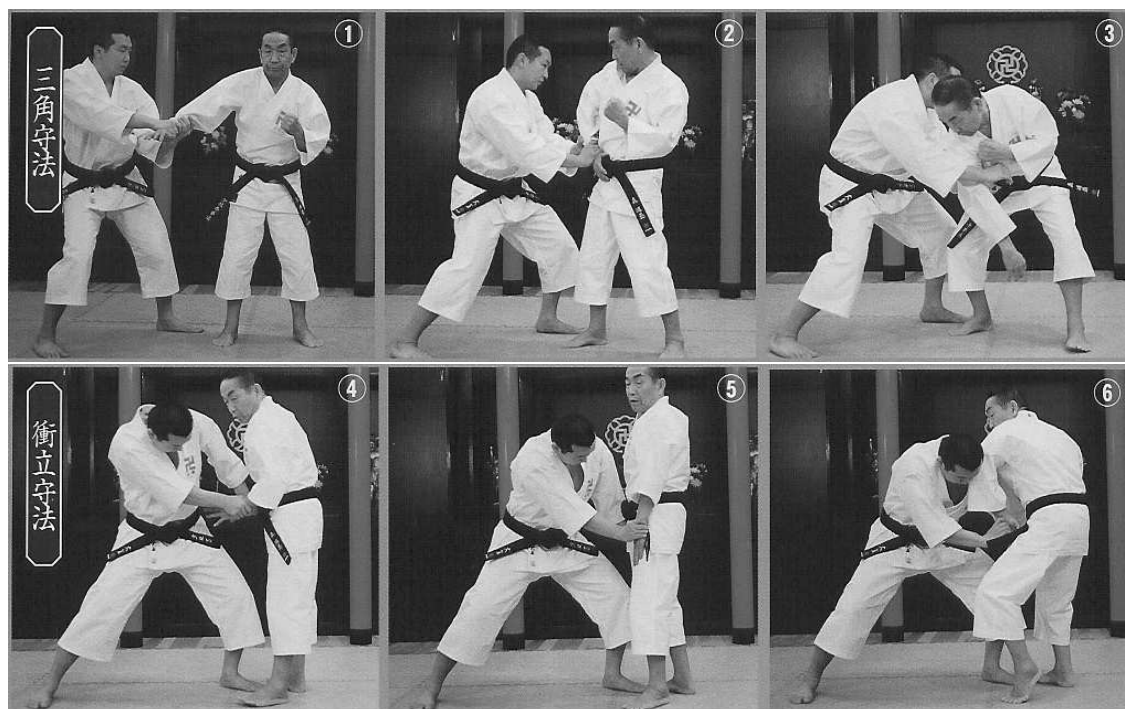


Figure 7: **The systematic relationship among shuhō methods.** [top row *sankaku shuhō*; lower row *tsuitate shuhō*] While *kagi te shuhō* may be considered the gateway to *sankaku gihō*, under some circumstances an insistence on applying *kagi te shuhō* can put you at a disadvantage. For just this reason, Shorinjikempo has various forms of *shuhō*, so that even if circumstances make it difficult to maintain the spacing used in *kagi te shuhō* you can still protect yourself and put in a counter-attack. Pictures 1 to 3 show a case too late for *kagi te*, where the attacker aims to twist the arm: the response is to defend yourself by putting the palm of your hand to your own side, in *sankaku shuhō* (picture 2). Pictures 4 to 6 show an attacker pushing down on both hands, in response to which you can neutralise the attacker's strength with *tsuitate shuhō* – standing upright and bringing your hands to your own body (picture 5). In each case, after *shuhō* the hands are freed by thrusting them vertically downwards (*tsuki nuki*), but these techniques also teach principles of force vectors and of body movement, such as the momentary raising then dropping of the shoulders in *tsuitate shuhō*.

down and pulls both your hands aiming to put you over his shoulder; in this case extend both arms and suddenly stand up straight. Each *shuhō* method has its individual mode of use, but all the methods are systematically connected. So if you're trying to perform *kagi te shuhō* but can't – maybe the attacker is too strong or your movement too late – you would instantly switch to another method such as *tsuitate shuhō*, so that you still end up in a better position than the attacker.

[paragraph skipped]

## The technique needs a plane to work on, so maintain some distance

As its name suggests, *sankaku gihō* involves use of a triangle – between the part that has been grabbed, and the attacker's two shoulders. The idea is to shift the attacker's weight momentarily onto one leg, thus making it easy to control him. We'll explain it using one of Shorinjikempo's archetypal techniques: *gyaku gote*, from *ryūka ken*.

In this *waza*, the response to having one's right hand grabbed by the attacker's right hand is to step the left foot out to the attacker's side, at the same time taking up *kagi te shuhō* and performing *meuchi* with the left hand, then bending the attacker's wrist and throwing him, ending with a pin.

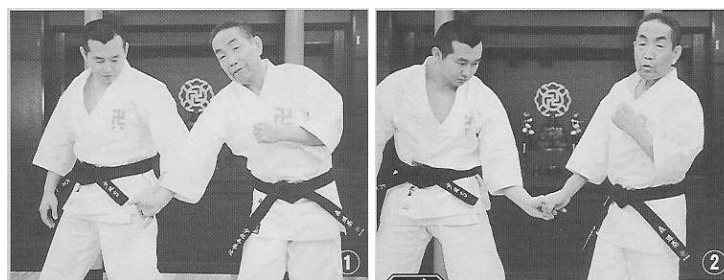


Figure 8: Shorinjikempo has a number of *shuhō*, conceived as ways of protecting oneself against various kinds of attack. Without going into detail, here we introduce a few of them for reference. In each case the key is in the way of making firm contact with the attacker [and hence forcing open some space to work with]. This is *konoha shuhō*. It is a protection against attack techniques of a special kind, in which the attacker grasps the four fingers (i.e., excluding the thumb) of one hand and tries to twist them in some direction (picture 1). The response is to close the hand fully at the instant of being grasped (picture 2).

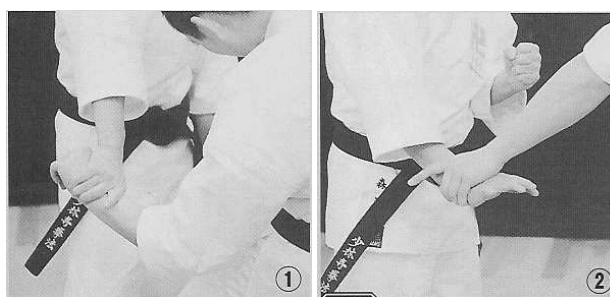


Figure 9: *chōji shuhō*. This again is for a special attack form, this time involving use of the thumb and forefinger for a *chōji* attack on some nerve point in the wrist (picture 1). This is neutralised by slightly opening out the fingers and thumb, and pressing the back of the hand against the attacker's palm (picture 2).

The difference in performing *gyaku gote* with *sankaku gihō* is that at the *shuhō* stage the attacker is already destabilised.

‘One important point is that when your hand is grabbed you step with *chidori ashi* [explanation of *chidori ashi* skipped]. If you don't do that, you'll still be standing in line for further attacks.

‘Furthermore, when you have made *kagi te* there must be some space between you and the point that has been grabbed – in this case the right hand. Without this space, even if you manage to free your hand you won't be able to throw the attacker... because there won't be room to move alongside and past him, nor can you apply *hazumi no ri*.

‘But there's one thing you have to know about the plane you create for yourself by means of this space: if you keep it horizontal, no matter how much you move it around, the attacker will just follow without being destabilised. It just turns into a dance, without any hope of performing a throw.

‘By contrast, if you tilt the plane to a diagonal then the attacker's weight shifts onto one leg, making him unstable and throwable. For this you need room between you and the attacker when you make *kagi te*. You also have to keep the grabbed part at a fixed point in space – because if it moves around it won't serve as a fulcrum for *teko no ri*. And you must be able to make good circular movements if you want to throw using *kuruma no ri* and *surechigau* [moving past the attacker] – otherwise at some point the attacker will be able to resist. Finally, without room it's difficult to apply *hazumi no ri*, making use of inertia.’



Figure 10: *hagai shuhō*. This is against a *hagai jime* attack [immobilising by putting one's hands under the victim's armpits from behind and locking them behind his neck]. The response is to bring one's elbows down so they overlap the attacker's elbows from above, then use movements of one's entire trunk to break free and to destabilise the attacker.

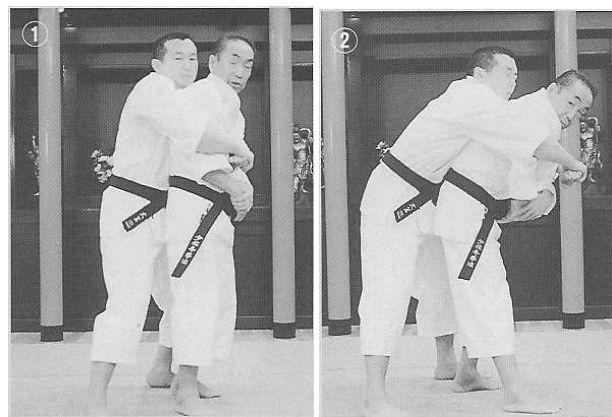


Figure 11: *yahazu shuhō*. In response to a bear hug, lean forward with both arms held up in a curved shape, making a space between the attacker's arms and body (pictures 1 and 2).

**‘*Sankaku gihō* is a technique for instantaneously moving an attacker's weight onto one leg, destabilising him for a forward or backward throw.’**

The basic idea of *sankaku gihō* is to use the triangle found within the attacker's posture, taking the triangle's base – from the point of grabbing, to the opposite shoulder – as an axis for rotation that will move his weight onto just one leg and thus bring him into an unstable position.

You learn the ‘back-down’ movement as a basic ingredient of *kote nuki*, while ‘front-down’ corresponds to *maki nuki* and *okuri gote*. The key to the latter is the meaning of the verb *okuru* [to send, i.e., sending the attacker away]. Mori-sensei's comment: ‘Most Shorinjikempo techniques are true to their names. Clearly *kaiso* really understood the essence of each one.’



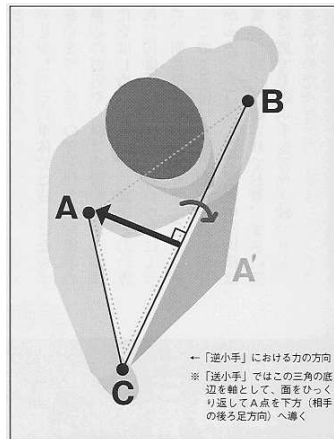


Figure 12: *sankaku gihō* diagram. This is a stylised representation of *sankaku gihō*. Points A and B are the attacker's two shoulders, and point C is the grasped location, forming a hypothetical triangle with BC as its base. Two take-down methods, 'back down' and 'front down', involve controlling the attacker by applying force along the line through A perpendicular to BC. In each case, rotating the plane ABC using the line BC as an axis shifts the attacker's centre of gravity, and hence takes him down. [Notes: arrow is the direction of force in *gyaku gote*; for *okuri gote* use the triangle's base (BC) as an axis, and turn the entire plane over to guide point A downwards (towards the attacker's rear foot)]

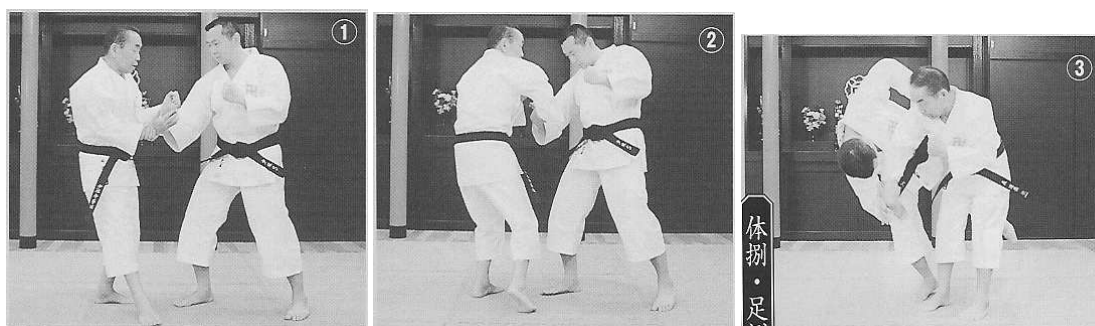


Figure 13: *tai sabaki*, *ashi sabaki*. You cannot hope to use *sankaku gihō* without mastering the basic techniques that underlie it. In particular, footwork is the top issue. Thoroughly master the two- and three-step movements used in *ryūō ken* and *ryūka ken* to effect the principle 'close to me, far from him'. By figuring out the direction and angle of the forces that are in play, eventually you'll move towards a level in which you yourself don't move, but can freely control an opponent with small manipulations.

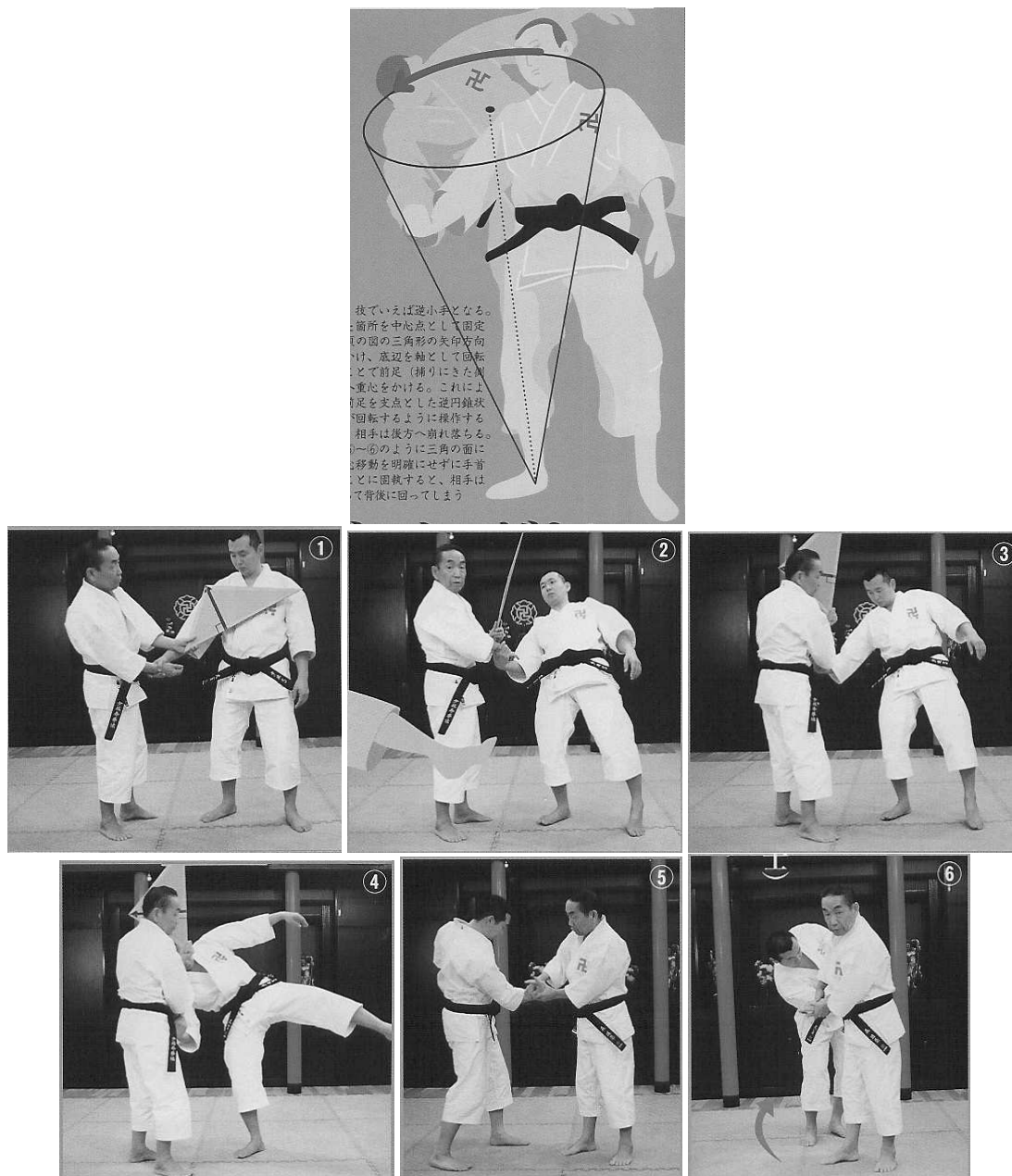


Figure 14: **Back-down.** Among techniques, this corresponds to *gyaku gote*. Fixing the grabbed point in space, apply force in the direction shown by the straight arrow in the earlier *sankaku gihō* diagram, rotating the triangle about its base and thus bringing the attacker's weight onto his front leg (the side he's using to grab). Then moving the attacker so his head follows along an inverted cone based at his front foot, destabilise him and throw him backwards. Pictures 5 and 6 show that if you don't move the weight in accordance with the triangle but just concentrate on twisting the wrist, the attacker will simply shift his foot and turn aside.

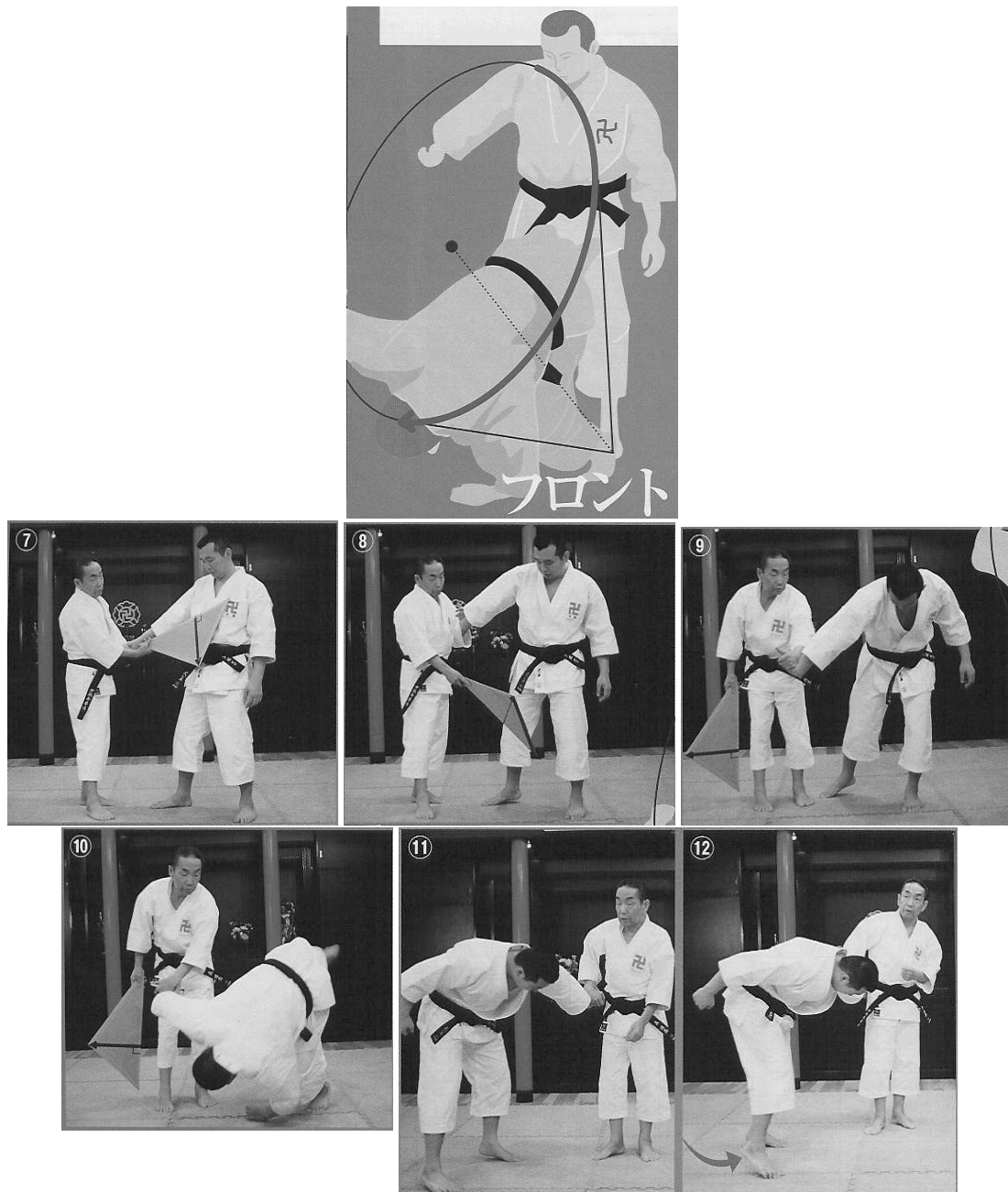


Figure 15: **Front-down.** This corresponds to a technique such as *okuri gote*. It uses the same imaginary triangle as the 'back-down' method, but the rotation about the base goes in the opposite direction. In this case the link between the attacker's right shoulder and left (rear) leg serves as the axis for the conical path of his head. Here too you can't complete the technique just by applying pressure to the attacker's wrist; his weight will come to his front leg, and he'll simply walk forwards (pictures 11 and 12).