

Black Belt Study Group
Masters Series
Bassai

This Book

The purpose of this document is to remind practitioners of the Bassai kata and how to get the best from them. No publication can *teach* a kata and its applications; this can only be done by a qualified instructor in a time set aside for tuition. This document can help to jog the memory and provide inspiration for further study of one of the greatest exercises in karate.

The Bassai kata is one of the most prevalent in martial arts. It occurs in many different styles with only slight differences. This in itself shows a common root to the traditions which share Bassai. Known variously as Patsai, Passai, Bassai Dai, or other variations, this kata can be seen in Taekwondo, Shito Ryu, Goju Ryu, Kyokushinkai, Wado Ryu, and many other styles of karate. Different *Sokes* have placed the emphasis on different techniques, but truthfully, they are all Bassai.

The version shown within heralds from Shotokan, nominally the style of Funakoshi Gichin, credited by many as the father of modern karate-do. Certainly, many movements within Shotokan have become homogenised and made safe for practice by school children. This does not mean that the old, dangerous techniques are removed, just that their applications have merely been overlooked in favour of simplistic explanations and hidden in order to favour the aesthetic required for competition.

The writing shown here is the Kanji for Bassai Dai. Originally it would have been written differently, but Funakoshi chose to write it in Japanese (which was a foreign language to him).

The term is made up of three characters:

the last one is **Dai**, meaning the greater part, *major* (as opposed to minor), or great (as in Great Britain).

The first character is **Batsu**, meaning to *extract* or remove.

The second character is **Sai** which is usually translated as Fortress but more likely means *obstacle* or blockage.



**Bassai Dai, written with
Japanese Calligraphy**

The usual given translation in the west is “**To Storm a Fortress, Major Version**”. We might think of it more literally as “*the major way of removing obstacles*”.



The tate shutouke which seems to precede a punch which is then followed by a block makes a mockery of the idea that kata would decisively end a conflict.

Firstly, the distance is clearly incorrect for the attacker to attack. This punch did not have to be blocked.

If you hit someone then why do you need to subsequently block their next attack? Did you fail to hit them properly? This is, of course possible, but not something that the masters of old would codify for us to remember as a core article of their teaching. Yes, if you fail to end the confrontation with one defence/retaliation then you must be prepared to continue; but this isn't a good reason for moves like this in kata. Students should practice for success, not failure.

This combination ignores the starting position of the hands placed at the hip. This ready position is apparently redundant. Why keep it then? (Answers over the page.)

If the attacker is able to attack again (necessitating your subsequent block) then why doesn't he just hit you again? If your blows are this ineffective why aren't you presented with an alternative strike which might do better (and not lead to you having to block fur-

3) Though often overlooked, the starting “cup and saucer” position is actually an effective defence all on it’s own!



Having avoided a punch, the attacking arm is latched and pulled to the hip. Once located securely at the hip, the wrist is seized by the right hand and the fist bent upwards to gain compliance. Usually, it will be found that the fist opens due to the energy flooding to the hand. Control of the wrist is achieved through the attacker feeling like he has “given up”. The short-circuit of his intention and subsequent concern for not having his face fall into the floor tend to manifest as a degree of compliance.

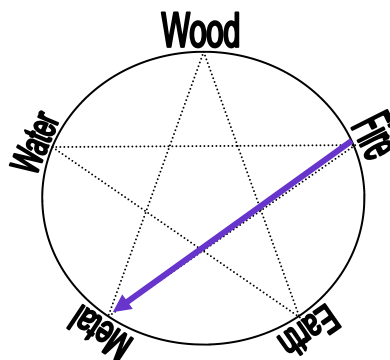
This is codified in the kata as a wrist at the hip with a hand placed at right-angles to it directly above it.

This is a smooth continuous action that yields with an opponent’s force and re-directs it to a position of relative security.



The location of the left elbow above the opponent’s right elbow effectively prevents them from struggling.

The meridians affected are the fire meridians on the outside of the arm, and then, on the latching action we combine them with metal points to make our classic “Fire melts metal” combination.



If possible, we seek to put pressure on the LI3 point of the index knuckle.

Extra pressure can be applied, depending on the ability level of the defender by seizing the ring finger and little finger separately from the other two fingers and applying pressure on them at separate angles to the hand.



An important point to remember is to vary the pressure/pain applied to the joints, as any constant pain can eventually be resisted.

Note that the action of the kata takes place after having avoided an attack. And that the “turning-pulling up” motion is what achieves the result.



12) Unfortunate enough to be restrained in a headlock we must be prepared to bite and gouge our way free.

Let's face it, we shouldn't really find ourselves in this situation if our zanshin is good! Then let's also face the possibility that we wouldn't need any physical skills if our zanshin were that far evolved, and that our physical skills are only necessary because at some stage someone may get the better of our zanshin.

There are many routes out of this situation, and one must not overlook the importance of struggling to keep the opponent off-balance or biting into the delicate rib area to aid the release. Turning the head will also help to keep the airway clear.



The hand which is next to the opponent can easily reach around and find GV26 by feel alone.

Our other hand strikes with a hammer-fist into the bladder/dantien area (CV4). In practice this strike **must not** be performed on females in even the most gentle fashion. This area of the body is too precious to risk.

The hand under the nose must not just pull backwards, but should feed through a 45 degree angle upwards and backwards.

Notice that this application makes good use of the "pulling back" feeling following on directly from the "double punch" of the kata.