

Kongoken —Large Iron Ring



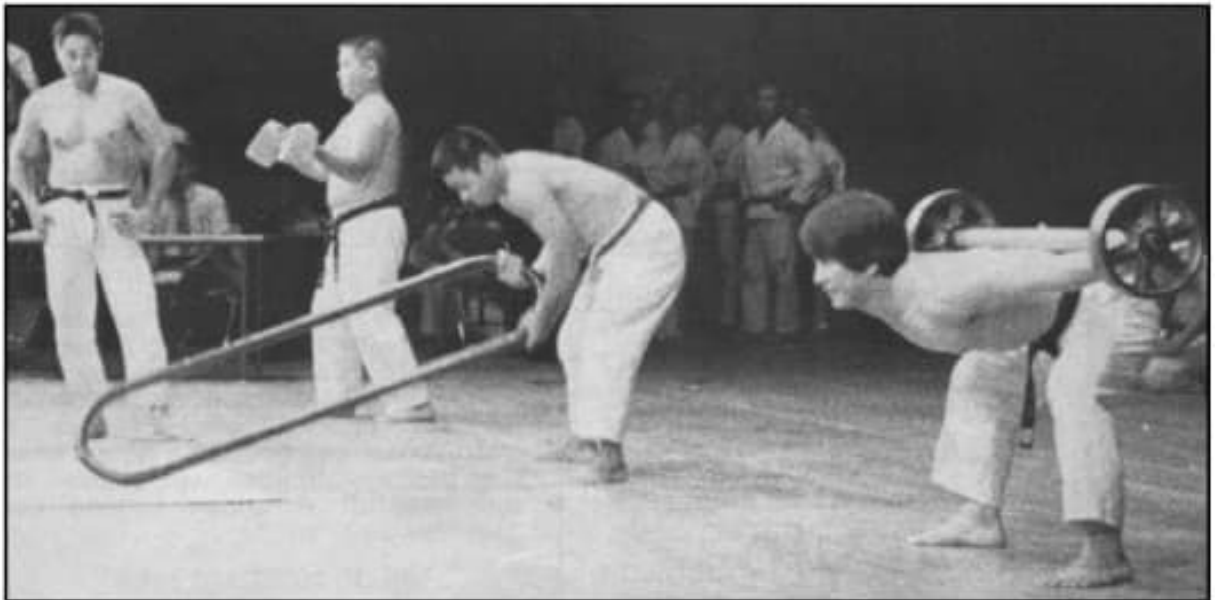
The author's teacher, Eiichi Miyazato sensei. This photograph was taken around 1960 when he was approaching 40 years of age. His judo, as well as his *ko/irte*, no doubt benefited from training with the *kongoten*.



The author at 40 years of age, wrestling with the *fojjgoterr* at his *dojo* in Perth, Western Australia.



With the *JsfrisDs/ii'* being demonstrated by a student of the Jundokan in the foreground of this photograph, a two-person *xorrgekenn* drill is under way in the background. Tokyo, October 1973.



Here, Ryosei Arakaki looks on while his fellow Jundokan students display the *rsfrsossif*, *kongoketi*, and *ton*. Tokyo, October 1973.

In the mid 1930s, Chojun Miyagi *sensei*, the founder of *Goju ryu karatedo*, traveled to the Hawaiian Islands in the mid-Pacific to teach *karate* and to lecture on its history and cultural benefits.¹³ During his time there, he observed the local wrestlers training.

Stopping to observe their methods, he noticed the use of a large and obviously heavy iron ring. Almost as tall as a man and weighing anything from 45 lbs. (20 kg) up to 80 lbs. (35 kg), it was being used by one and sometimes two wrestlers in ways that captured the *karate* master's imagination. So impressed was he by the training aid, legend has it he brought one or more home with him on his return to Okinawa in the early part of 1935.^H The original use of the *kongoken* is now lost and open to speculation. However, through my correspondence with Charles C. Goodin¹⁵ in Hawaii, I concur with his suggestion that it is most likely these heavy loops of iron were used initially as either ship's ballast or in some way connected to the crushing of sugar cane, a crop that has been cultivated extensively on the islands since they were first occupied around A.D. 600. Later European occupation brought with it mechanization and modern extraction methods and as a result the farming of sugar became an important export industry for the islands.

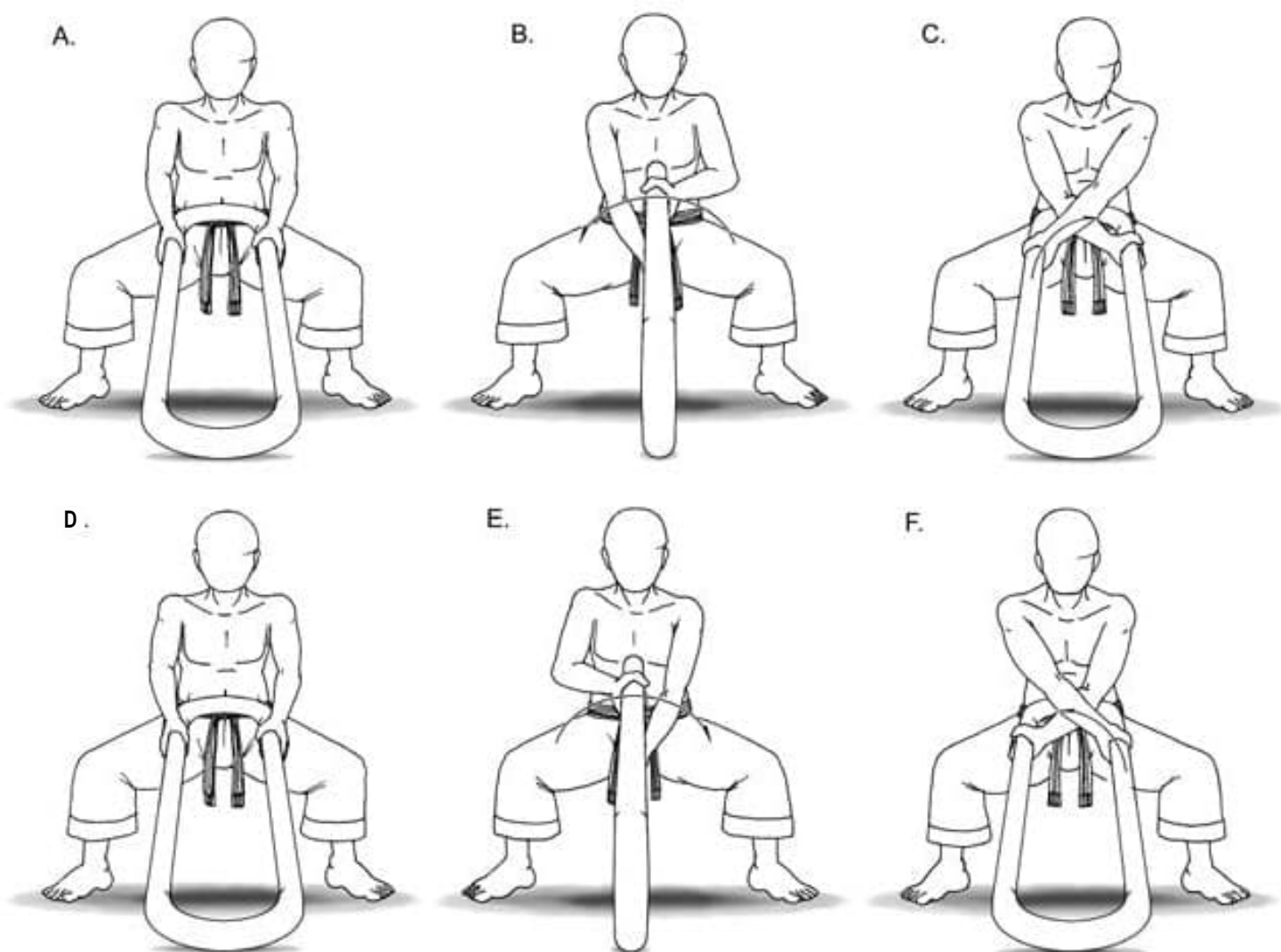
Those who worked the cane fields, however, came mainly from the lower economic strata of Hawaiian society, and it is unlikely that such people would have had access to whatever first-class training equipment existed at the time. If interested in any form of pugilism, individuals would have undoubtedly made use of the things they came into contact with during the course of their everyday working lives. Regardless of what the *kongoken* was originally used for, in the hands of Hawaiian wrestlers or the *karateka* back on Okinawa, it became yet one more tool in an arsenal of training devices employed to help them develop the kind of strength and power they were looking for to complement their fighting technique.



Hisao Sunagawa and Kazuya Higa, both senior students of the Jundokan dojang in Okinawa, working with the AongoAen to increase leg strength. Both men, friends and contemporaries of the author, are in their 5d's.



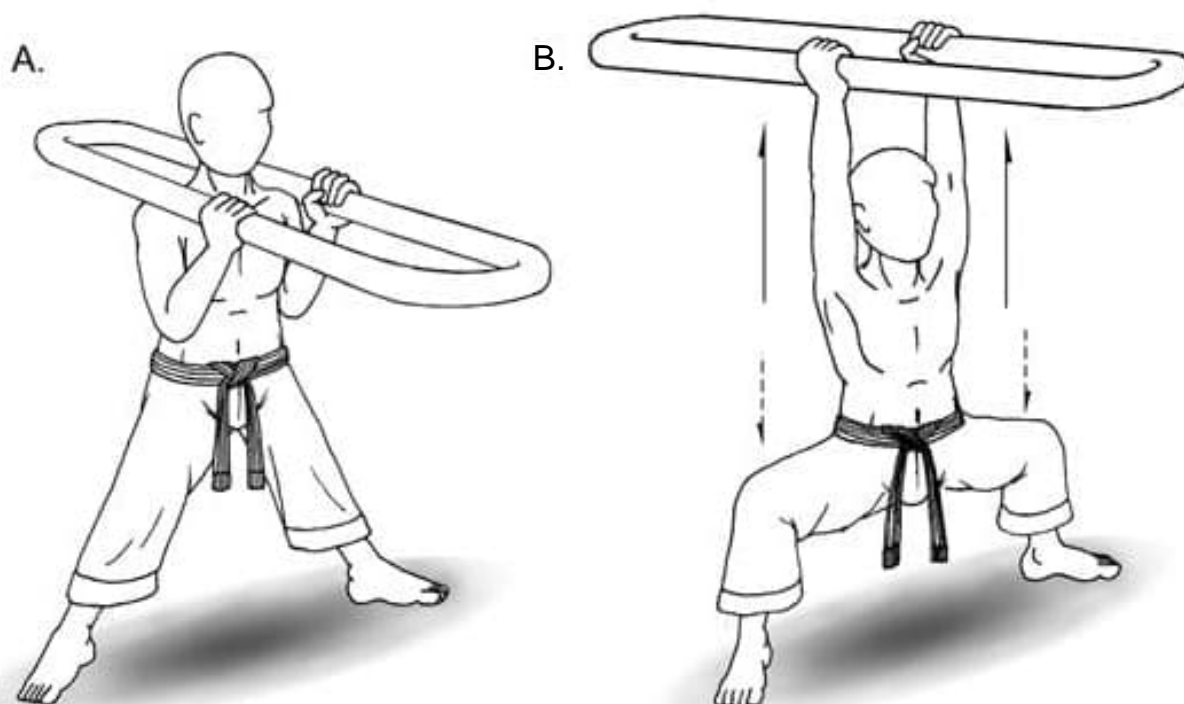
The author after a workout with the kongoken at Morio Higaonna sensei's dojo in Kiyose, Tokyo in 19S6.



Exercise 1

Begin by holding the *kongoken* as shown (Figure A). Making sure your back is upright and the legs strong, allow the tool to slip through the fingers and palm of the hand while the left arm pushes over and the right arm pushes under (Figure B), thus twisting the tool on its own axis. With the arms now crossed (Figure C), both of them pull in a reverse motion returning to the starting position (Figure D) and continue through twisting the tool to the opposite side (Figures E and F) before once more reversing. It is important not to stop there, however, but to continue by pushing and pulling in a continuous motion, back and forth, from one side to the other. The movement of the arms being crossed on one side to being crossed over and back again counts as one exercise. If possible, you should try to begin by completing at least fifty. Do not allow the legs to come up out of a strong *shiko dachi*. Regardless of how difficult this exercise might seem in the beginning, you should remember that with one end of the tool remaining on the ground, only a portion of its true weight is being dealt with.

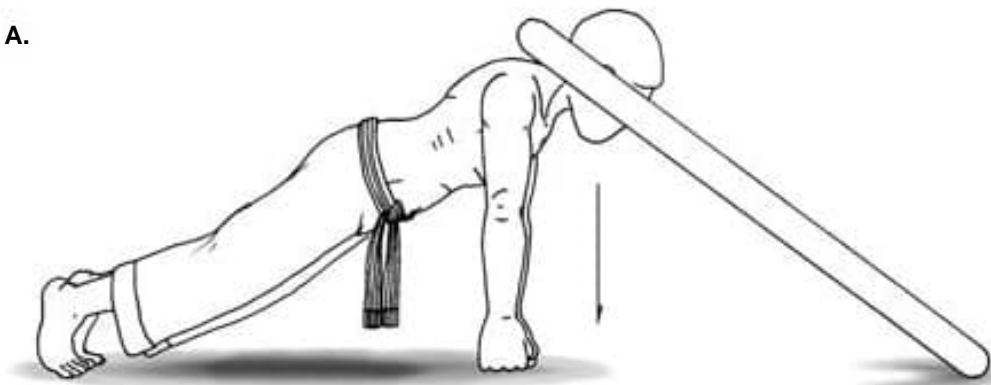
As always, the breath is a vital partner in how the tool is manipulated and should be utilized as seamlessly as possible. In short, an inhalation accompanies every pulling action of the arms and an exhalation accompanies every pushing action. Try to synchronize your breathing with your movements. If you move too quickly, it becomes difficult to breathe and results in the exercise coming to a halt. Successfully harmonizing the physical action with the breath makes the tool seem to move almost by itself. Use brute force and the tool always wins. Moreover, a final word of caution—if you are doing this exercise on a wooden floor, be sure you use a rubber mat or some kind of carpet to protect the floor.



Exercise 2

In this exercise, the aim is to use explosive power to lift the *kongoken* above the head. Begin by finding the balance point along the center of the *kongoken*, bend the knees, and allow the tool to come to rest above the shoulders. Standing with the feet wide enough to allow a drop into *shiko dicht* and with the *kongoken* balanced in the hands (Figure A), take in a deep breath. With as forceful exhalations as possible emanating from the *tanden*, drop into *shiko dachi* and thrust the tool above the head (Figure B). Hold this position for two or three seconds before relaxing back into the upright position and allowing the *kongoken* to come back down to shoulder height. Should either be necessary, re-adjust your stance or the balance of the *kongoken* before executing another lift. If possible, this exercise should consist of three sets of six lifts, with each set separated by a one-minute rest.

A.

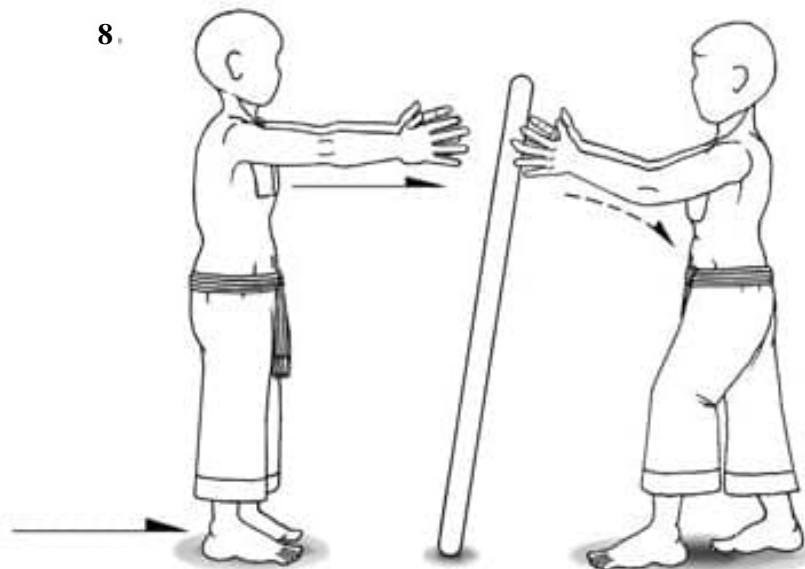
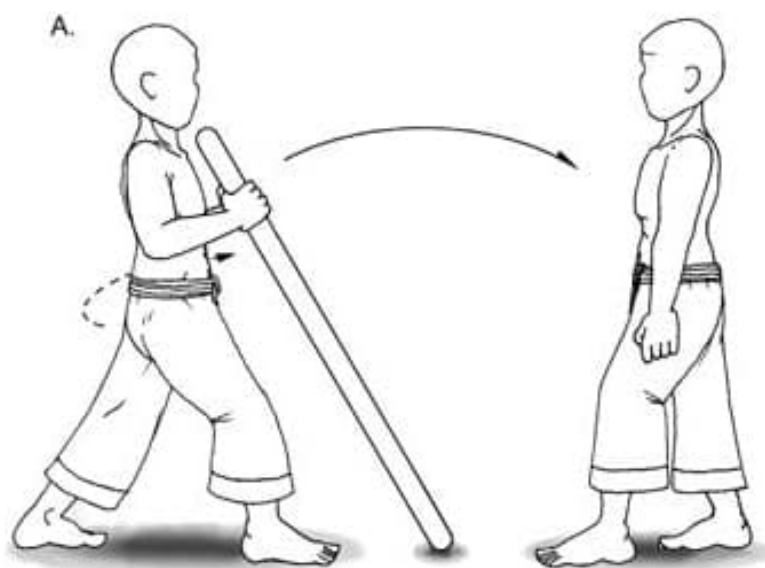


B.



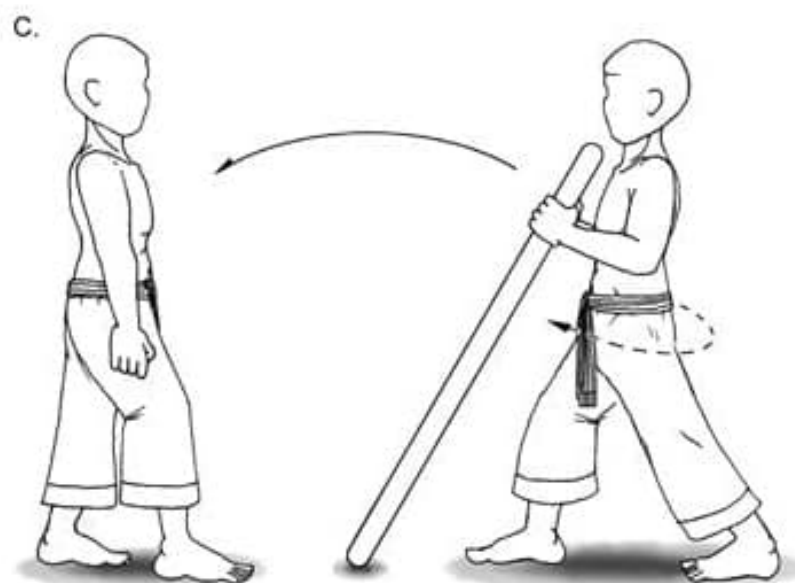
Exercise 3

Assume a normal push-up position—experienced *karateka* should be on their first two knuckles. See Figure A on page 156 about push-ups in the chapter about auxiliary exercises. Have a partner place one end of the *kongoken* over the head, resting on the neck. From this position, execute ten push-ups before the tool is removed for a thirty-second break. At least three sets of ten push-ups should be done each time to feel any benefit, dire stronger you become, the more sets you can schedule into the exercise.



Exercise 4

The next two exercises are aimed at working the tool with a partner. Both people should be familiar with the tool and be able to handle its weight. Standing in *heiko dachi* (natural stance) an equal distance from the *kongoken* (Figure A), the idea is to use explosive power to throw the tool away and into the hands of your partner. Try not to grab at the tool too tightly; rather leave the hands open and relaxed but prepared, and use the arms as shock absorbers to help dissipate the incoming force when the *kongoken* comes your way. Be careful to guard the face from impact by timing the 'catch' with the speed of the approaching tool and taking a small step backward. When the *kongoken* begins to approach, reach out to meet it and let the sides of the tool fall into the open palms of both hands. Bend the arms and step backward. This

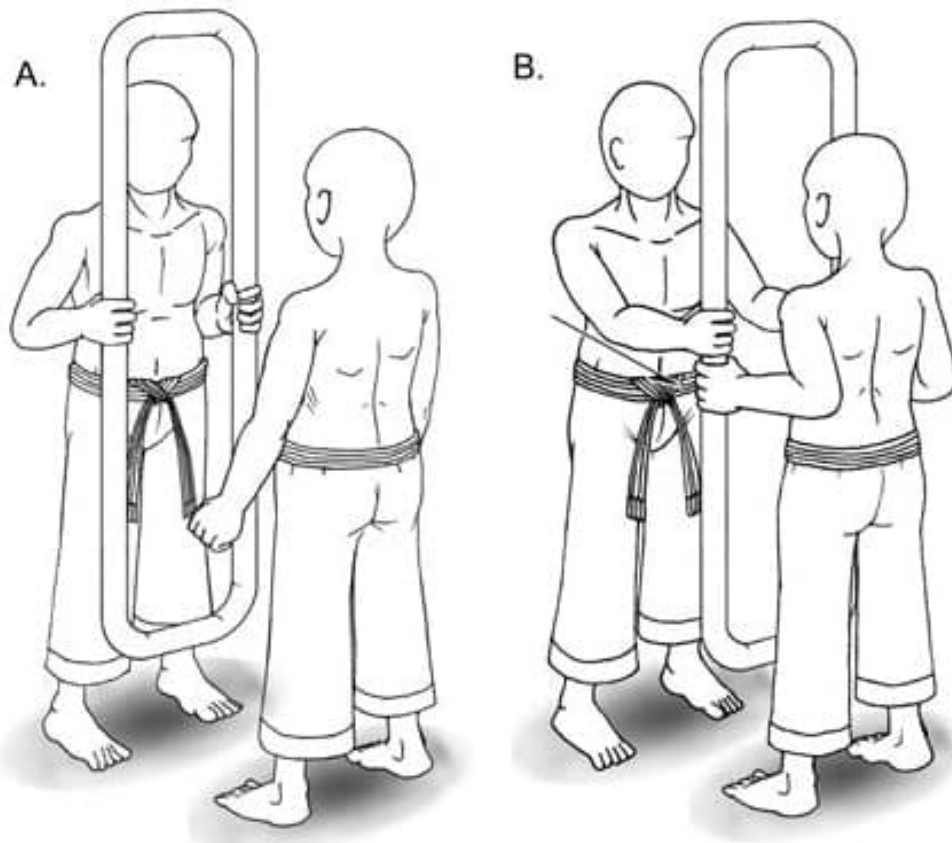


receiving action is done with an accompanying inhalation that ends at the same time as the physical movement. When throwing the tooh care should be taken to coordinate the rear leg, the arms, and the strong exhalation that accompanies each throw. Remember to breathe out by contracting the *tanden* and not the upper chest. The rear leg is brought sharply back tip to *beiko dachi* by the use of a powerful push from the hip, while at the same time the arms thrust out like two hydraulic rams (Figure B). Both actions are done while breathing out and focusing the *tanden*.

When the *kongoken* returns, step back with the opposite leg each time and repeat the catching and throwing exercise with the opposite side of the body (Figure C). The aim is to build explosive power over a very short distance with only a small movement, using the thrust of the hips [*koshi*]. At first, try to complete fifty throws, eventually leading to one hundred or more when the skill and feeling for what you are doing improves.

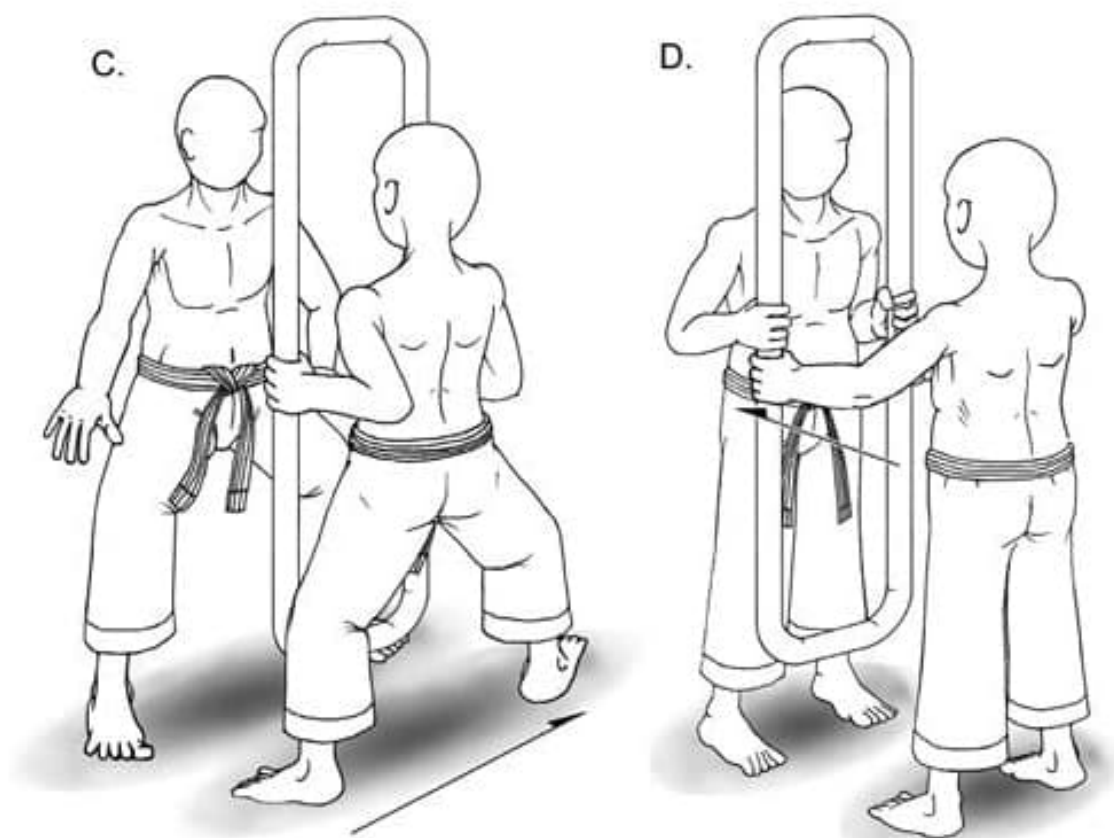


The author's Jtomjoten at the Shinseidokan cTojo. It weighs 50 Lbs. (23 kg).

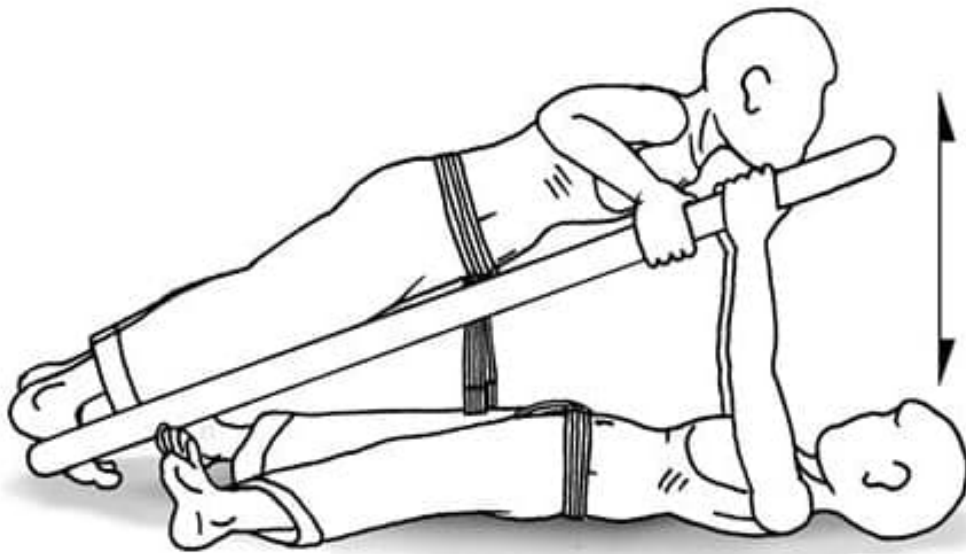


Exercise 7

Stand in *heiko dachi* facing a partner holding **the kongoken** close **to** the chest as shown (Figure A). One person always grabs on the top, and the other always grabs on the bottom; you should decide which before the exercise starts. Thrust **the kongoken out** toward your partner, who in turn should reach out and take it (Figure B).



Both then use *tai sabaki* (body shifting) to slide to the side (Figure C) before the tool is handed back (Figure D). A second body shift, back to the original positions, is done before the *kongokeii* is once more handed back to your partner. This sliding back and forth and the handing over of the tool should be done at least ten times in one set. A short rest in between sets is needed. The number of sets depends on the strength, skill, and determination of the two people involved. Correct breathing, as always, is essential if the tool is not to take over and bring you to a premature standstill. Inhale when you accept the tool, slide quickly to one side, and then exhale (completely) when you hand the tool back. This exercise tests your breath control after only a few exchanges. If it is not in harmony with the movement, it stops you in your tracks.

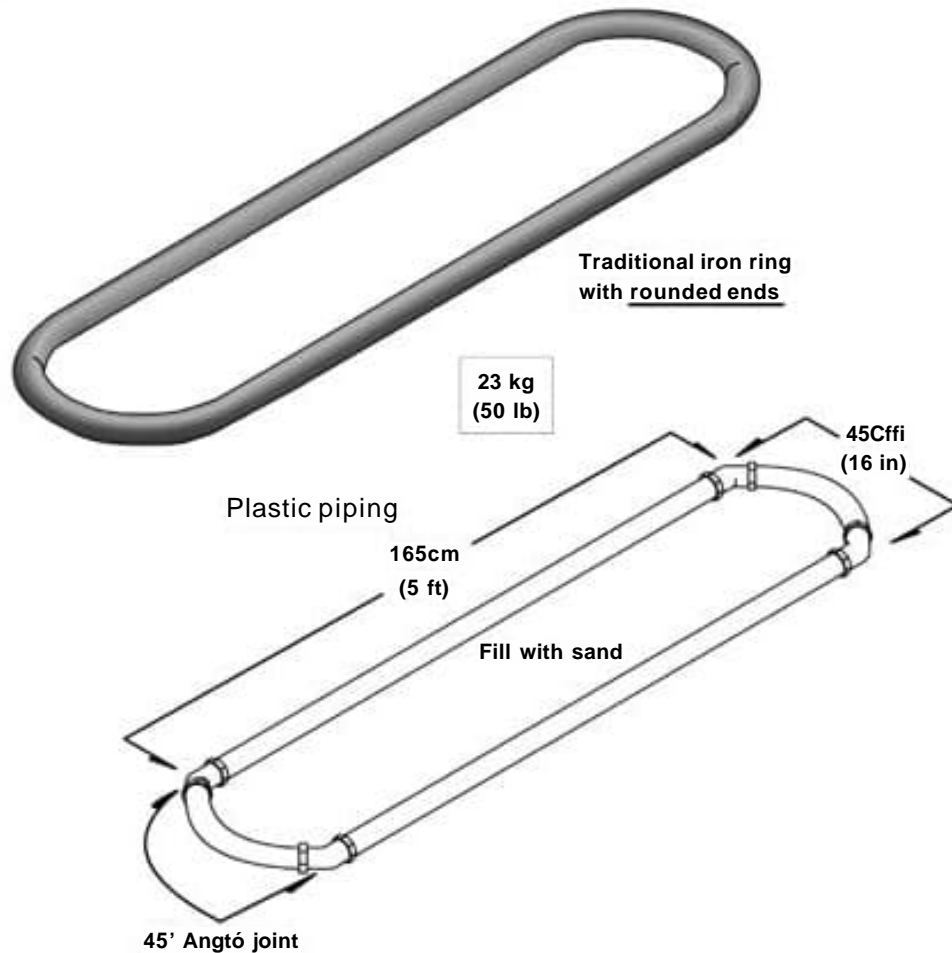


Exercise 6

One person lies on his back with his legs spread open, holding the *kongoken* as if doing a bench press. His training partner then places his feet on the end of the tool and puts his hands onto the *kongoken*. The further toward the top of the *kongoken* the partner places his hands, the heavier and more challenging this exercise is for the person on the ground. From this position, the person doing the lift takes a deep breath in through the nose and, with exhalation, pushes the *kongoken* and his training partner up until the arms are outstretched. Once this is done, bend the arms and lower the tool and your partner back down with care and control. Once you become used to this exercise, it can be done in a slow and confident rhythm until a desired number of repetitions have been completed.

When working at first with this tool, it is advisable to have a training partner who is able to assist should the weight become unmanageable. Having two people working together also allows one person to rest while the other is working the tool. Each person can be an effective source of encouragement to the other when the going gets tough and the number of repetitions begins to undergo a mental review when fatigue starts setting in.

Kongoken Construction Notes



Seriously heavy or made from plastic pipe and sand, construct a tool that will challenge all who pick it up.

Again, it might prove difficult to obtain this tool, difficult, but not impossible! My first *kongoken* was made from household plastic plumber's pipe filled with sand. However, serious training requires a serious tool and a heavy ring of iron or steel tubing must be found at some point. Fabrication and engineering factories are a good place to go. If you approach them with the right attitude and ask for assistance, it is possible to acquire a *kongoken* that outlives the owner. Between five and five and one-half feet (150-165 cm) in length, it should be wide enough to allow your head to fit comfortably in between each of the sides when you rest the tool on your shoulders. Traditionally, the tool should approximate the weight of another person. In my *dojo*, the *kongoken* weighs 50 lbs. (23 kg).