

Double-Handle Chiishi



Author's flijish).



The twin-handle driisffi evolved from simply lifting heavy rocks and containers, as seen in this drawing from an ancient Chinese training manual, into the specific lifts done with the tool today.



Sashi ishi training advice on display at the Karate Museum in Nishihara. Once a handle was added, the tool was used differently.



The twin-handle *chiishi* at the Jundokan in Okinawa.



A close-up of the hybrid tooi. This one is on display at the Okinawa Karate Museum and shows the merging of two tools leading to the evolution of a third.



A test of timing, strength, and nerve for Satoshi Taba at the Jundokan, Okinawa.



Examples of chiishi at the Okinawa Karate Museum.



Satoshi Taba of the Jundokan *dojo*. Okinawa, training with the twin-handle *chiishi*.

As well as the more common single-handle *chiishi* used by *karateka* on Okinawa and around the world, there exists another *chiishi*, a much heavier one that is used exclusively for two-handed exercises. Less common these days than its single-handled cousin, it affords those *karateka* who use it an opportunity to work their bodies in ways not possible with the more common tool. The following three exercises should be done with even greater care than usual because the weight involved is significantly heavier. Certainly in the early stages, it is advisable to work with a partner when lifting this and the *kongoken*.

The double-handle *chiishi* began life as nothing more than a large rock, weighing



A Jundokan student works out with the *chiishti* during a summer jassoufaj in Okinawa.



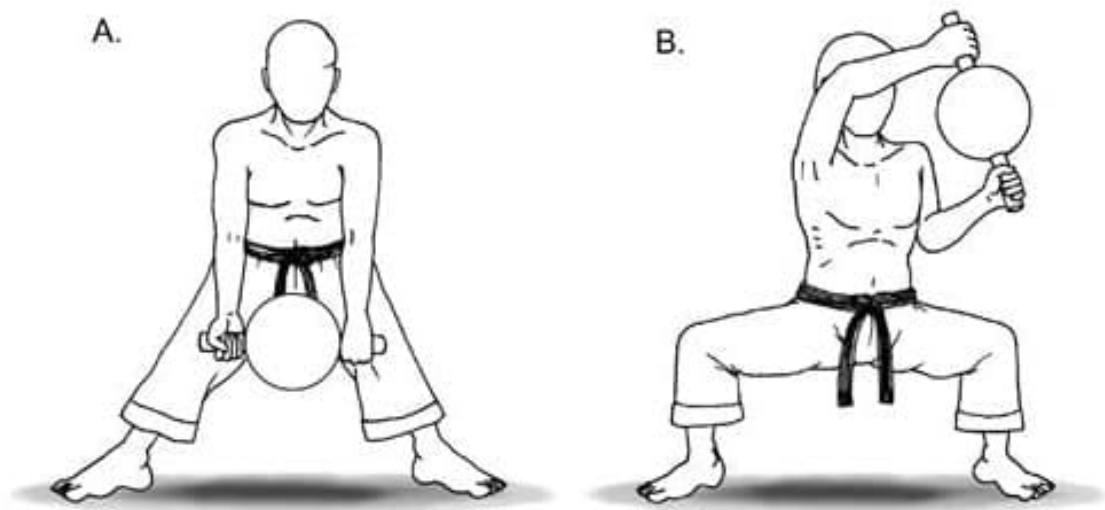
The author training with the *chiishti* at his Shinseidokan dojo, Tasmania c. 2008.

around 50 lbs. (23 kg), with the original exercise consisting of little more than picking it up and walking around with it, or lifting it up onto one shoulder before passing it over your head and returning it to the ground on the other side. Eventually, people's favorite rocks were kept and later fashioned into smooth rounded stones (*sashi ishi*) that, in due course, had holes drilled in them and wooden handles inserted through the center. This allowed for a variety of lifting exercises, some of which more closely resembled the moves found in *karate*, and thus targeted the same muscle groups used by *karateka* when training in their fighting art. The benefits from this approach are obvious: a stronger body made for techniques that are more powerful. With the natural physique of the Okinawan male being, until fairly recently, short but sturdy, it comes as no surprise that there has always been a desire among the island's *karate* men to develop their bodies. Many of the great masters of the past employed the concept of *hojo undo* in their daily training.

Anko Azato, for example, was known to have had *hojo undo* tools in various parts of his home. In the book *Tanpenshu: Untold Stories of Gichin Funakoshi*, coauthored by Patrick and Yuriko McCarthy, translated and published 2004 in Brisbane, Australia, Funakoshi relates a story about his teacher, Yatsutsune (Anko) Azato:

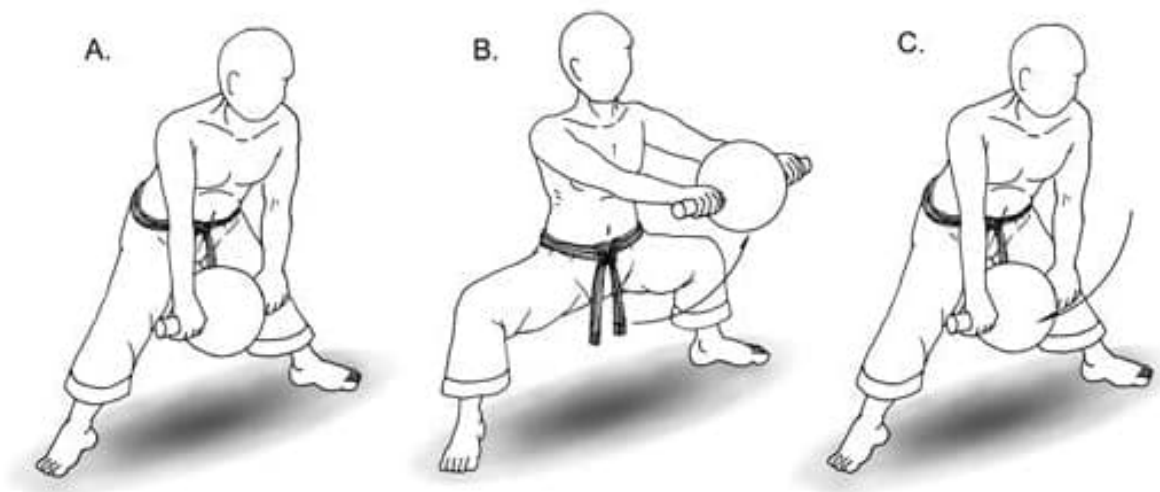
During my teacher's youth, few martial arts enthusiast could even afford the supplementary training equipment which is commonly associated with training these days. However, Azato was an exception and it was because he was from a family of wealth and position that he could afford such things. In fact, his home looked like one big training facility Both standing and hanging makiwam were located in various rooms of the Azato residence, along with other training equipment, which included wooden cudgels, stone weights, iron balls for grip strength development, shield and machete, flails, iron truncheons (sai), and even a wooden horse for mounting practice and archery spotting Master Azato had created a living environment where he could train anytime and anywhere he liked, (p. 46)

When reading this description for the first time, I could not help but wonder if the stone weights being referred to here were in fact *chiishi*. In 1987, when J was training in Tokyo at the *dojo* of Mono Higaonna, I had the opportunity to visit his home in the outlying district of Kiyose a number of times. His backyard was easily distinguishable from those of his neighbors by the fierce looking *makiwara* planted firmly in the earth, and by the *chiishi* and *kongoken* that stood dose by. Inside his home, he had a sheet of A4-sized paper suspended at head height in the doorway to the kitchen, and on it was a crude drawing of a face, the eyes had been cut out to give it the appearance of a grotesque mask. Whenever Higaonna *sensei* walked past it, he would throw out a lightning fast finger strike into one or other of the open eyes. Sometimes he would open the index and middle fingers of his hand and poke them through both eyeholes with the one strike. He told me that if he did it right he could hit the target without tearing the flimsy paper, but if he got it wrong, he would rip the paper and then have to construct another one. In all the visits I made to his home, I only ever saw the one mask.



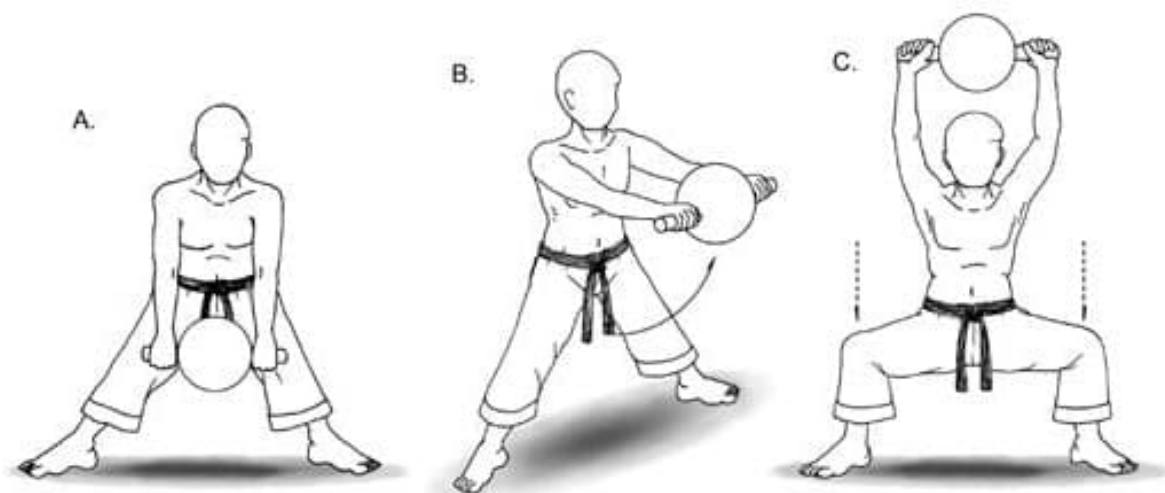
EXERCISE 1

Keeping the back straight and using the legs to lift the *chiishi*, grip the handle (as shown in Figure A) with the right hand palm out, the left hand palm inward; then stand up. From there inhale before dropping quickly into *shiko dachi* (low stance) and throwing the *chiishi* up and out to the side on an exhalation (Figure B). Hold that posture for one or two seconds before returning to the start position and repeating the exercise. Reverse the grip before working the opposite side of the body. In both cases, make sure the legs are locked into a good stance throughout and the head is held in a natural posture, with eyes looking at the *chiishi*.



EXERCISE 2

Both hands grip the *chiishi* with the palms facing inward; from here swing the tool between the legs, which should be straight to gain momentum (Figure A). One swing suffices. Then bring the *chiishi* up and hold it for a brief moment directly out in front of the body while dropping into *shiko dachi* at the same time (Figure B) before letting the tool swing back down (Figure C). The breath should be inhaled through the nose while the swing lifts the tool and exhaled sharply through the open mouth when the tool comes to a stop in front of the body. Because this kind of *chiishi* is traditionally much heavier than its single-handled cousin, the number of repetitions is fewer. Still, every effort should be made to make the number of exercises sufficient to work the body and mind hard. Again, allow the eyes to follow the *chiishi*.

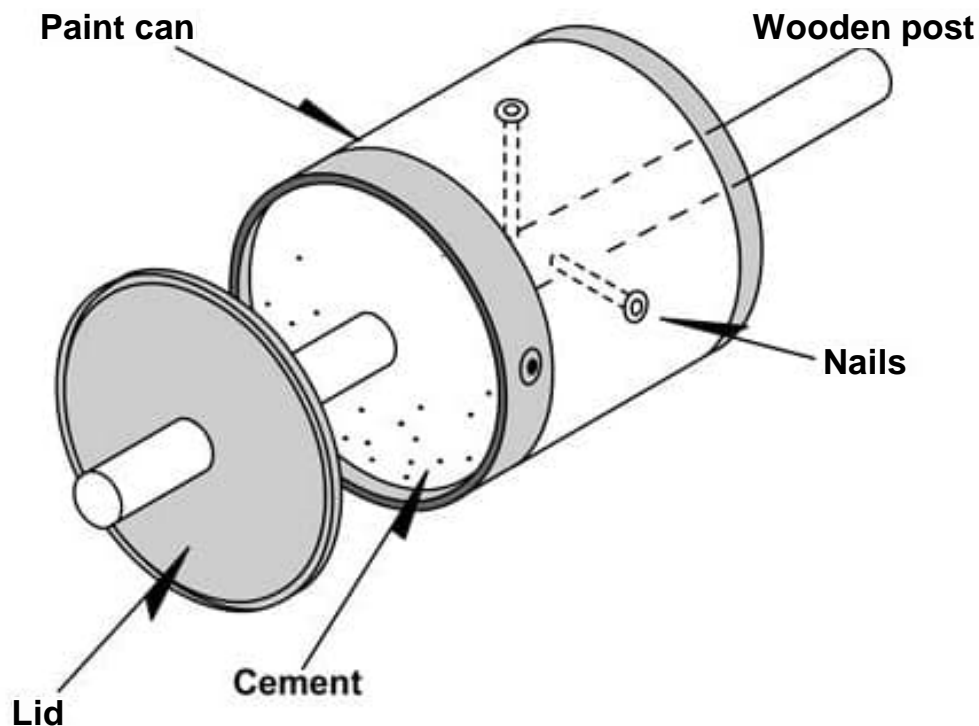


Exercise 3

This exercise is an extension of the previous one. This time, however, the *chiishi* is swung completely vertically and the arms are locked into position directly above the head, while at the same time the body drops down into *shiko dachi* (Figure A). Again, great care should be taken to lock both the legs and the arms into position, while simultaneously using the breath in coordination with the physical movement. The hands should grasp the handle firmly, with the head held naturally and eyes looking forward. Hold this position only for a second before swinging it back in front of the body, between the legs and back up again. In all, this should be done at least three times before placing the tool on the floor and resting. During the lift, an inhalation accompanies the swinging of the *chiishi* upward, and the exhalation is issued when the tool is held above the head and you have dropped into *shiko dachi*.

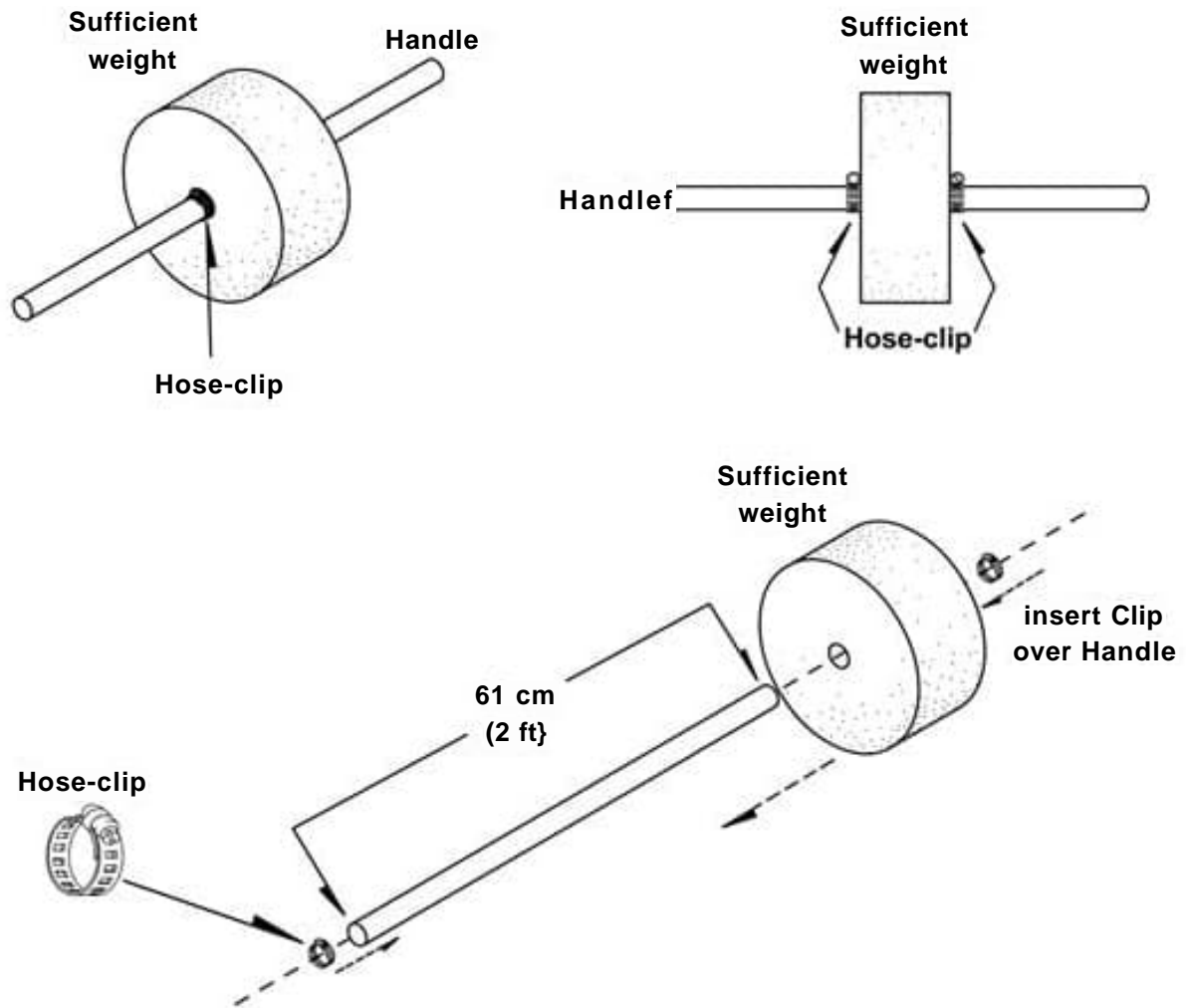
As with all the tools, a poorly constructed *chiishi* can cause more harm than good. Due to the heavy weight and the nature of the exercises, a poor method of practice with this tool has the potential for very serious injury. Therefore, you should use caution and common sense always, train with a partner, and check every tool, every time, before use, to make sure it is safe. Above all, remember to work with weights that can be controlled.

Chiishi (Double Handle) Construction Notes



An old paint can filled with cement, with wooden dowel passing through it. Nails are driven into the dowel before inserting it in the can and pouring the cement.

If a large enough stone cannot be found, then make a hole in the bottom of a big old paint can and also through the center of the lid. Place a strong length of wood through both holes and fill the empty can with cement. Do not make the holes too big; the handle should only just pass through them. Replace the lid back on the can, making sure the handle sticks out equally at either end, and allow it to dry. A few nails knocked into the center of the wooden handle before the cement is poured helps stabilize the tool when in use.



Standard weights require hose clips to be secured on each side.

If the previous method of construction seems too ambitious, then simply purchase enough standard weights to offer sufficient resistance and a length of strong wood with a diameter thick enough to pass tightly through the center hole, to form a handle. Make the handle approximately two feet (61 cm) long. Place it through the center of the weights and secure firmly with nails and hose clips with screws. The *chiishi* I use in my *dojo* weighs almost 50 lbs. (23 kg). It is made from an old flywheel from a tractor and weighs approximately 10 lbs. (4.5 kg), along with two 20 lb. (9 kg) weights.