

Applying Kendō no Kata in Shinai Kendō

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It can be difficult, especially for beginners, to fully understand the information encoded in the [kata](#) and apply it to [shinai kendō](#) as this requires a firm grasp of several aspects of kendō which depend heavily on experience.¹

At the same time the [waza](#), footwork, [kamae](#), and even the zanshin used in the kata themselves can seem completely disconnected from what is done in shinai kendō. Because of these issues this often relegates kata to something [kendōka](#) learn “just for grading” and not something [kendōka](#) actively pursue to aid in their shinai kendō practice.

While there will be overlap between kata, the following were chosen as examples for which some applications can be seen. These examples are of course not the only kata which may or may not be applicable to a given situation.

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Beginner Kendō

Applicable Kata. [Tachi](#) kata #1 teaches all of the basics of kendō: sen, seme, correct [maai](#), [sūtemi](#), and zanshin.

Both [uchidachi](#) and [shidachi](#) make their initial approach with the sense of spiritually building their intent to strike, reaching a point of no return at [issoku ittō no maai](#).²

Shinai Kendō. Beginners should focus on the basics of attacking, fully committing to their strike, and ignoring any apprehension of being struck. Approach the opponent with full spirit and strike.

This article assumes familiarity with the kendō no kata as well as several terms related to the kata and shinai kendō. This information can be found in the club's "Nihon Kendō no Kata & Kihon Bokujō Waza - Study Guide", found [here](#). A subset of the glossary found in the above study guide has been included for reference.

¹ For example: [seme](#), [tame](#), [san-sappō](#), the [mitsu no sen](#), [sen](#), [kyo-jitsu](#), [ki-ken-tai-itchi](#), [metsuke](#), and [zanshin](#).

APPLICABLE KATA

Tachi kata: ipponme

² Y. Inoue (2016)

Key Aspects of Zanshin

Applicable Kata. Tachi kata #1 shows shidachi maintaining a [connection](#) with uchidachi after the strike, adapting as they move with the intent of controlling them; they are still fighting.³

Tachi kata #7 enforces shidachi maintaining eye contact with uchidachi throughout their ōji waza and during their movement(s) after the strike (physical zanshin), all while maintaining their fighting connection toward uchidachi.⁴ However in this particular kata, maintaining eye contact dictates *how* shidachi can move during zanshin or how they have to adapt their movement in order to keep eye contact, e.g., when and how do they turn such that they maintain eye contact vs. turning their back to the opponent.

Kodachi kata #1 has shidachi engaging uchidachi with an overwhelming spirit after their strike, maintaining eye contact and connection with uchidachi.⁵

Shinai Kendō. Zanshin is defined by these aspects: being in a physical and spiritual position to deal with the opponent's potential attack, i.e., always ready to continue fighting the opponent.⁶ The most basic and essential component of this is maintaining eye contact. When striking don't just *mindlessly* move past the opponent, e.g., shinai overhead, eye contact lost, poor posture or foot position, and combatively disconnecting from the opponent. Instead, after striking an opponent, adapt the standardized practice movements to maintain eye contact and your combative connection with them.⁷

Applying Basic Seme

Applicable Kata. Tachi kata #3 has shidachi moving forward with a strong spirit, even though uchidachi controls center after parrying their attack(s).⁸ Invading their maai pressures them both spiritually and physically until their kamae crumbles.⁹

Shinai kendō. For basic seme kendōka move forward confidently and attack, embodying the feeling of being unstoppable, and attempt to make the opponent's spirit falter.

APPLICABLE KATA

Tachi kata: ipponme
Tachi kata: nanahonme
Kodachi kata: ipponme

³ Shidachi's zanshin is a series of movements following uchidachi as they take two steps back after being countered by shidachi. The first is to direct the [kensen](#) toward the eyes, the second is to follow with [hidari jōdan](#).

⁴ All kata require consistent eye contact, however nanahonme makes it much more explicit in the key points after the kata descriptions, AJKF (2002)

⁵ This is embodied in the jōdan position during zanshin.

⁶ FIK (2017)

⁷ *Standardized practice movements* refers to the motions practiced in shinai kendō of moving straight past the opponent upon striking. This motion is *practice* for certain aspects of zanshin, *but is not itself actual zanshin*.

APPLICABLE KATA

Tachi kata: sanbonme

⁸ Uchidachi's kensen is on shidachi's centerline after each of the two parries, while shidachi's is deflected off of uchidachi's center. Uchidachi assumes [hidari](#) and [migi shizentai](#) during each deflection to aid in this positioning.

⁹ The term used to refer to shidachi's spirit while pressuring uchidachi here is [kurai-zume](#).

Seme-Tame

Applicable Kata. In tachi kata #6 shidachi applies seme at three distinct points, but in a continuous fashion, while maintaining focus and readiness. Their pressure forces uchidachi to react defensively. Patiently applying pressure, and not rushing to immediately attack, they eventually draw out uchidachi's desperate attack and counter it.

Shinai Kendō. The key is to apply seme continuously, pressuring the opponent whenever they move, react, or attempt to regain control. At the same time, one must have tame; holding one's spirit, consistently building it, while being patient enough to attack at the correct time, e.g., when the opponent is forced to react to your seme creating an opportunity to attack or counter attack. Pressuring and then rushing in to attack is not always correct; attack when the opponent becomes exposed.

Dealing With Aggressive Opponents

Applicable Kata. At the beginning of tachi kata #7 shidachi's confidence is said to be 50% that of uchidachi; uchidachi attempts a thrust to pressure shidachi and observe their reaction/force an attack (*ki-atari*). Shidachi holds uchidachi off in a stalemate and then matches their spirit. With spirits equal and in *seme-ai*, shidachi gives the aggressive uchidachi what they want: an opening to attack. However this is a lure; shidachi easily manipulates uchidachi, via *kyo-jitsu*, and counters.

In kodachi kata #3 uchidachi abruptly attacks shidachi as shidachi applies seme.¹⁰ Shidachi, maintaining focus, adapts to uchidachi's strike attempt(s).

Shinai Kendō. The key idea here is that shidachi uses uchidachi's aggression against them, giving them what they want most: an opening to attack. When they take it, shidachi is able to counter as they are the ones dictating the pace of the encounter. At the same time shidachi must maintain their composure and not be overcome by the threat of an aggressive opponent. This is an application of *kyo-jitsu* and in tachi kata #7. Specifically, the opponent will attack if they perceive a weak spirit or detect an opening in your *kamae*. So, *externally*, show a weak spirit or a flawed *kamae* (*kyo*) but in reality have a strong spirit *internally* and *lure out their attack* by purposely exposing a physical or spiritual opening in your *kamae* (*jitsu*). They *want* to rush in and hit you – let them.¹¹ Manipulate them to attack when you dictate but be calm enough to be able to adapt your response(s) according to the opponent.

APPLICABLE KATA

Tachi kata: ropponme

APPLICABLE KATA

Tachi kata: nanahonme
Kodachi kata: sanbonme

¹⁰ Shidachi threatens uchidachi by attempting to shift to *iri-mi*, AJKF (2002) and Y. Inoue (2003).

¹¹ This is an application of *katsujin-ken*.

Dealing With Defensive Opponents

Applicable Kata. In tachi kata #4 uchidachi assumes *hassō no kamae*, or *in no kamae*, and shidachi assumes *waki-gamae*, or *yō no kamae*.¹² Shidachi pressures uchidachi with their kamae and threatens an attack. As uchidachi is in a reactive state, shidachi manipulates them, forcing them to make an attack. Shidachi creates a stalemate and then manipulates uchidachi to strike again allowing them to counter.

In kodachi kata #2, uchidachi alters their kamae with the intent of defense. As they do, shidachi pressures them with *iri-mi no kamae* and invades their maai, forcing uchidachi to react out of desperation and launch a hasty attack. This allows shidachi to easily counter attack.

Shinai Kendō. The key idea here is, like an aggressive opponent, you must manipulate the opponent. For a defensive opponent, internally, they want to defend against your strike either by blocking or by waiting to attempt an ōji waza. Using patient aggressiveness, pressure the opponent forcing them to retreat, use feints to draw out a desperate ōji waza attempt or a block, and then strike the target that opens. Or as the opponent is made to feel more and more defensive, they will soon attempt an attack out of desperation. Manipulate them by giving them what they want: an opening in your defenses as you continue to pressure them. When they attempt their desperate strike, counter.¹³

Fighting Against Jōdan

Applicable Kata. Tachi kata #5 has shidachi assume *seigan no kamae*. This covers their kote and leaves men open somewhat. From this kamae shidachi is better able to apply seme toward uchidachi's left kote. Uchidachi, threatened by shidachi's pressure, and now with limited target options, attacks men. Shidachi is able to counter.

In tachi kata #6 shidachi invades uchidachi's maai in seigan with strong spirit, threatening an attack toward uchidachi's left kote. Uchidachi is unable to stay in the jōdan position under this pressure and is forced to retreat.¹⁴

Tachi kata #7 shows shidachi resisting uchidachi's seme, creating a temporary stalemate and matches uchidachi's spirit. This has two effects: (1) increases uchidachi's desire to take the initiative, and (2) allows shidachi to effectively draw out an attack.

In kodachi kata #1 shidachi forces uchidachi to attack due to the threat of *tobi-komi iri-mi*.¹⁵ In essence they spiritually dominated uchidachi and are able to control them, forcing them to attack as they dictate.

APPLICABLE KATA

Tachi kata: yonhonme
Kodachi kata: nihonme

¹² In, from *in-yō*, corresponds to waiting, defense, stillness, etc... and *yō* corresponds to moving, attacking, etc..., Y. Inoue (2003).

¹³ When facing a defensive opponent it is important to be ready to use *shikake waza* and *ōji waza* depending on how the opponent reacts to your pressure as they may attack, attempt *ōji waza*, or block. Compare this to an aggressive opponent who will very likely attempt to strike when they perceive an opening against an opponent that applying pressure in *seme-ai*.

APPLICABLE KATA

Tachi kata: gohonme
Tachi kata: ropponme
Tachi kata: nanahonme
Kodachi kata: ipponme

¹⁴ The crucial part here is that when shidachi advances in seigan it is not just a step forward to close distance, but a step that spiritually overwhelms uchidachi by threatening an attack while invading their maai.

¹⁵ AJKF (2002)

Shinai Kendō. The most important idea here is that one must spiritually dominate the jōdan player. The jōdan player must be made to feel uncomfortable and exposed while in their kamae. Initially this is not an issue as their maai is usually longer than that of a player in *chūdan no kamae*.

Correct seigan is the first step. This limits the targets available to the jōdan player to (easily) strike, while at the same time directs the kensen toward the most easily accessible, and closest, target on a jōdan player: their left kote.¹⁶

Next their maai must be invaded. The longer one allows a jōdan player to be comfortable at their distance, the more likely they will be able to create or find an opening to strike. The chūdan player has to take the initiative and move in on them. But they must move in with a strong spirit, threatening an attack vs. just moving forward. The jōdan player is always looking for the chūdan player to act defensively, either by blocking or looking to perform an ōji waza. If the chūdan player has defense on their mind, the jōdan player *will* be able to manipulate them into protecting their men or kote and then strike whichever target opens. The chūdan player must move in with the intent to strike at any opportunity the jōdan player's spirit falters and not just wait to counter attack. Once this approach against the jōdan player has been established, they can be manipulated in much the same way an aggressive or defensive opponent can be, depending on how they react to your approach.

During all of this, one must be able to resist the jōdan player's lures and aggression while maintaining one's composure in order to focus on offense through both shikake and ōji waza.

Efficient Ōji Waza

Applicable Kata. Tachi kata #2 has shidachi apply pressure, evade an attack, and counter with minimal movement, making ōji waza more efficient. This requires two things: (1) shidachi must wait for uchidachi to commit to their strike, i.e. *allow themselves to be exposed*, before they perform an ōji waza. (2) Shidachi must lure out the attack from uchidachi by threatening with an attack of their own.¹⁷

Shinai Kendō. Combining (1) and (2) above, ōji waza have to be done as a proactive waza, not a reactive one.¹⁸ Press as if to strike with shikake waza and observe the opponent. If they are caught off guard, or pre-emptively block: attack. However if they are pressured and react by striking, *let them attempt to strike you*. When they commit: counter attack. If your ōji waza are physically efficient, i.e., no wasted or unnecessarily large movement, as in the kata, there is plenty of time to strike the opponent. Don't rush.

¹⁶ The key term here is *easily*. Jōdan players can still strike kote on an opponent in seigan, however the attacks used for this can be more difficult, potentially slower, and more easily telegraphed to the opponent due to the altered motions. When under strong pressure, and one's composure is disrupted, it is human nature to attempt faster, more direct, or even desperate/reactionary attacks.

APPLICABLE KATA

Tachi kata: nihonme

¹⁷ That is in order to attack with ōji waza, one must effectively threaten the opponent with shikake waza.

¹⁸ *Reaction* is always slower than *proaction*. This is the key element to ōji waza: if they are done reactively, i.e., wait to see the opponent attack, ōji waza will often fail. Instead, *force the opponent to react to the threat of your shikake waza*, then use an ōji waza appropriate to their actions.

Resisting Seme

Applicable Kata. In tachi kata #7 uchidachi attempts a thrust to pressure shidachi into attacking, disrupting their focus or composure, or to force shidachi to face them at a pace other than the one shidachi wishes to use, a result of taking sen or applying seme. During this thrust, it is said shidachi's confidence is at 50% (compared to uchidachi). Shidachi maintains their composure and parries the thrust, maintaining control of their center, and also maintaining their maai with uchidachi. As they do this their focus and spirit is increased to match uchidachi, and they both enter a mutual seme-ai.

Shinai Kendō. How resist seme, i.e., how to combat the use of the methods in the kata against you? *By maintaining a calm, focused composure with an intent to attack while under pressure in seme-ai.*

If the opponent attacks, or threatens an attack, you don't have to try and outhit them. Maintain maai, redirect their weapon, or whatever needs to be done to hold them off in stalemate as in kata # 7. Once this is done, *your spirit and focus must increase to match the opponent's*, at which point both (re)enter seme-ai. This *does not* mean to try and match their pace or rhythm as this would allow them to dictate the encounter and exert control over you. It means to have a strong spirit, be ready, have sen, etc... and to hold on to these *while under pressure* (tame).

Once in this seme-ai, attempts to manipulate the opponent as an aggressive or defensive opponent can be made depending on their reactions. Probe what the opponent's reactions are via seme of your own, e.g., tachi kata # 3 (shidachi) or 7 (uchidachi). Maintain seme and tame, kata #6 (shidachi), and attempt to manipulate them into making an error or taking on a pace that you dictate.

Failing this, go back to beginner kendō: tachi kata #1 — attack with full commitment!¹⁹ This can make ōji waza more difficult for the opponent, especially if they are attacks that they are not dictating or perceiving you will make, or if one takes control of center prior to attacking.²⁰ That, combined with the threat of a strong spirited attack, will apply seme against them which may make an opportunity for some of the above manipulations against them.

APPLICABLE KATA

Tachi kata: nanahonme

while applying:

Tachi kata: ipponme

Tachi kata: sanbonme

Tachi kata: ropponme

¹⁹ This is a risky approach, however against an experienced or exceptionally skillful kendōka it is often the only tool that is remotely viable.

²⁰ An attack made with full commitment makes ōji waza more difficult as they are usually more direct. This alters the timing, and the amount of time the opponent has in which to perform the ōji waza. If their timing is off, their counter attack will be awkward, weakened, or possibly not made with the mono-uchi.

Glossary

B

Bokutō

(木刀) “Wooden sword.” The bokutō, *tachi* and *kodachi*, are primarily used to practice *nihon kendō no kata*. The *tachi* is also used in the *bokutō waza* and is often used to practice *shinai kendō* basics such as *suburi*.

Bokutō ni yoru kendō kihon waza keiko hō

(木刀による剣道基本技稽古法) “Practice of fundamental kendō techniques with a bokutō.” See *bokutō waza*.

Bokutō waza

(木刀技) “Wooden sword techniques.” Abbreviation for *bokutō ni yoru kendō kihon waza keiko hō*. A series of forms created to practice fundamental *shinai kendō* techniques with *bokutō*.

C

Chūdan no kamae

(中段の構え) “Mid level stance.” Chūdan is known as the “*kamae of water*” due to its adaptability for offensive and defensive *waza*. Chūdan is the fundamental *kamae* in *kendō*.

Connection

En in Japanese, meaning a “*bond, link, relationship, or connection*.” In *kendō* this implies a mental and physical connection to the opponent. The mental connection implies one has a perception as to how the opponent will act, their intents, their level of focus, *ki-ken-tai-itchi*, and *zanshin*. The physical connection allows one to respond to physical movements, maintain distance, adjust *kamae*, etc... A connection is essential to understanding the *rhythm*.

E

En

(縁) A “*bond, link, relationship, connection*.” See *connection*.

F

Four sicknesses

The four sicknesses (*shi-kai*), or admonitions, are *ku* (恐怖) “*fear*”, *gi* (疑) “*doubt*”, *kyu* (驚) “*surprise*”, and *waku* (惑) “*confusion*.”

G

Gedan no kamae

(下段の構え) The “*low level*” *kamae*, also known as the “*kamae of earth*.” *Gedan* can be considered a *kamae* of

waiting, inviting the opponent, but it also applies *seme* from below by threatening a thrust.

H

Hanmi kamae

(半身構え) “*Half body stance*.” When assuming a *hanmi kamae* the torso is turned so it is only half exposed to the opponent.

Hassō no kamae

(八相の構え) The “*eight position stance*.” Also known as the “*kamae of wood*” and sometimes *in no kamae*, it is a variant of *jōdan no kamae*.

Hi no kamae

(火の構え) The *kamae* of “*fire*.” See *jōdan no kamae*.

Hidari

(左) “*Left*.” Relative direction, e.g., right & left.

Hira-seigan no takai

(平正眼の高い) A “*high, tall*” variant of “*flat, common, ordinary*” *seigan no kamae*. The variant of *seigan* written as (正眼) is equivalent to *chūdan no kamae*. This term then refers to altering one’s *chūdan* to be higher. Specifically this *kamae* is used against an opponent that assumes *hidari jōdan no kamae*.

I

In no kamae

(陰の構え) “*Waiting/still*” *kamae*. The antithesis of *yō no kamae*. See *hassō no kamae*.

In-yō

(陰陽) The Japanese reading for the *individual characters* for *yin-yang*. The term as a whole is correctly pronounced as *onmyō*, meaning “*dual cosmic forces*.”

Iri-mi

(入り身) (lit.) “*Entering body*”, often translated as “*entering directly*.” This is the intent while using the *kodachi*. The action of spiritually threatening and physically moving into your opponents *maai* to attack.

Iri-mi no kamae

(入り身の構え) (lit.) “*Entering body stance*.” This is the position taken when invading the opponent’s *maai* through *iri-mi*; the *kodachi* is in *chūdan no kamae*, blade downward, and the *kensen* directed toward the opponent’s throat.

Issoku ittō no maai

(一足一刀の間合) The “*one step, one sword distance*.” The distance where one can launch, or evade, an attack by taking one step; the fundamental *maai* of *kendō*. While there are approximations, often described as the

distance where opponents' sword tips cross, each individual has their own *unique* issoku ittō no maai due to the fact that each person's physique defines a different length for "one-step".

J

Jōdan no kamae

(上段の構え) The "high level/positioned" *kamae*. As jōdan is spiritually aggressive, the terms *ten no kamae* and *hi no kamae* are used to describe the spirit and intent required to be effective.

K

Kamae

(構え) "Stance" or "position." In *kendō*, this term has an obvious physical meaning, but it also has mental or spiritual implications.

Kata

(形) See *nihon kendō no kata*.

Katsujin-ken

(活人剣) "The life-giving sword." In sword arts "life-giving" does not refer to not killing the opponent, but to not kill their attacking spirit, i.e., allowing the opponent to act (attack). By manipulating the opponent and allowing them to feel free to attack, opportunities for *ōji waza* can be created. Using a *katsujin-ken* then refers to a particular type of strategy for defeating the opponent. "Katsujin-ken... involves a sophisticated manipulation of the opponent and his actions by means of utter selflessness; properly conducted it is virtually undefeatable", Friday (1997). This is a central strategy in *Yagyū Shinkage-Ryū* and other descendants of *Shinkage-Ryū*. The antithesis of *katsujin-ken* is *setsunin-tō*.

Ken

(1) (剣) "Sword", (2) (懸) "Be trapped, begin, attack."

Kendō

(剣道) "The way of the sword."

Kendōka

(剣道家) A *kendō* practitioner.

Kenjutsu

(剣術) "Sword art/technique."

Kensen

(剣先) "Tip/point of a sword." The tip of the *shinai* or *bokutō*; also called the *kissaki*.

Ken-tai-itchi

(懸待一致) (lit.) "Attack and waiting in unison." This notion includes many complicated ideas that relate to the application of *seme* toward the opponent in order to set up an opportunity to strike. Simply put, one pressures the opponent through *seme* (attack) and then holds to see their reaction (waiting), calmly preparing to either counter-attack or initiate an attack depending

on the result, i.e., *seme-tame*. The meaning of *ken* in this instance adds complexity as it translates to "attack", but it also can mean "to begin" or to "be trapped". This could imply forcing the beginning the encounter or trapping the opponent into a situation they must respond to and that they do not control.

Ki-atari

(気当たり) (lit.) "Spirit/energy hit/prediction." Displaying an offensive stance or intent to strike, then observing or anticipating the opponent's reactions.

Ki-ken-tai-itchi

(気剣体一致) "Spirit, sword, body, as one." The unified action of the spirit, sword, and body of a *kendōka* is a fundamental principle in *kendō*.

Kissaki

(切先) See *kensen*.

Kodachi

(小太刀) The "short sword" used in the *nihon kendō no kata*.

Kurai-zume

(位詰め) (lit.) "Level (of) rebuke." Pressure the opponent into disadvantage through physical and/or spiritual intimidation. Invading an opponent's *maai* through strength of spirit, posture, *kamae*, etc... alone; no specific *waza* is needed.

Kyo-jitsu

(虚実) (lit.) "Truth and illusion." A complex term with many interpretations, but the most basic is that when one is in a state of *jitsu* (実), "truth, preparedness, reality" they are prepared, and when unprepared they are in a state of *kyo* (虚), "unpreparedness, falsehood, fake." Opportunities to strike occur when one is in a state of *jitsu* and the opponent is in that of *kyo*. A more complex situation of *kyo-jitsu* is that one can present a weakness or expose an opening *purposely* as a lure to the opponent (*kyo*) but the true intent is to strike as they react (*jitsu*). Or one can have their outward *kamae* or posture be in a state of *kyo*, again as a lure or deception, but keep their mind in a state of *jitsu* in order to take advantage of the opponent's actions. These complex examples are directly linked to *seme*, *tame*, *ken-tai-itchi*, and the *mitsu no sen*. Both the basic and advanced use of *kyo-jitsu* requires a *connection* to the opponent.

M

Maai

(間合) "Spacial integration." Often interpreted simply as "distance", *maai* includes many variables from both oneself *and* the opponent: speed, reaction time, power, distance, *kamae*, etc...

Metsuke

(目付け) "Point of observation." The full term is "enzen no metsuke" or "fixing your eyes on a distant moun-

tain". This refers to where one looks while engaging an opponent, likening looking at the opponent to looking at a mountain, the opponent's eyes being the peak. Focusing directly at the peak limits the view to just the peak, look *toward* the peak and the entire mountain can be viewed.

Migi

(右) "Right." Relative direction, e.g., right & left.

Migi shizentai

See [shizentai](#).

Mitsu no sen

(三つの先) "The three sens." This refers to the three initiatives giving your attack an advantage. The first, *sen sen no sen* (先々の先), refers to having prior knowledge of your opponents intentions and, using this knowledge, draw out their attack capitalizing on it. The second, *sen no sen* (先の先), refers to attacking at the very moment your opponent is about to attack. Third is *go no sen* (後の先). This refers to counter-striking your opponent after they have made their attack. The opponent is countered as in *sen sen no sen*, but knowledge of the opponents intentions are not known beforehand.

N

Nihon kendō no kata

(日本剣道の形) "The Japanese kendō forms." These are the formal set of techniques designed to express the technical principles of swordsmanship which form the basis of modern [shinai kendō](#).

O

Ōji waza

(応じ技) Counter-attacking [waza](#), i.e., techniques used in response to your opponent's attack.

R

Rhythm

A term frequently used to describe the unique flow and/or timing(s) associated with multiple aspects of an encounter. "There are a variety of rhythms in strategy. First of all, understanding the matching rhythm and distinguishing from the rhythm which does not match, and from among rhythms large and small, slow and fast, understanding the rhythm of hitting the mark, understanding the rhythm of intervals, and understanding the rhythm that goes against rhythm – these are the most essential things in strategy. If you do not get how to discern the rhythm of opposition, your strategy will never be certain", Musashi (2012).

S

San-sappō

(三殺法) (lit.) "Three killing laws." Three methods for overwhelming an opponent using a sword; (1) *ken (w) o korosu*: kill their sword, (2) *ki (w) o korosu*: kill their spirit, and (3) *waza (w) o korosu*: kill their techniques. The basic idea is that killing the opponent's spirit implies overwhelming them with your own, causing hesitation and doubt. See [four sicknesses](#). Killing the opponent's sword implies controlling their ability to manipulate their weapon for offensive or defensive purposes. Finally, killing the opponent's techniques implies countering or anticipating the opponent's intentions, removing their ability to make an effective attack.

Seigan no kamae

Most commonly written as (正眼の構え) (lit.) "Correct eye stance" or (晴眼の構え) (lit.) "clear eye stance." Often translated as "aiming at the eyes." There are several variations of *seigan*, each a slightly different [kamae](#) with respect to the position of the [kensen](#), and each written with different characters, Shigeoka (1977) and Imafuji (2019). Previously in the [nihon kendō no kata](#) the term *seigan* was common and the variant used was to be understood from the context. In modern [kendō](#) the term has been eliminated from the official kata descriptions. One specific variant is still used in response to [jōdan no kamae](#) and is often called *seigan* or [hira-seigan no takai](#), H. Inoue (2003), but in the kata descriptions it is referred to as "a *chūdan position*", AJKF (2002), with notes on how to assume it correctly.

Seme

(攻め) An "attack" or "offense." From the verb *semeru* meaning "to attack" or "to assault", *seme* is most often interpreted as "pressure", e.g., a spiritual pressure put on the opponent, the intent of which is to make them focus on your (perceived) imminent attack resulting in a momentary loss of composure creating various opportunities to strike.

Seme-ai

(攻め合い) "Union of pressure." *Seme-ai* is the point where two opponents actively pressure one another in an attempt to create an opening. *Seme-ai*, realistically, only occurs when in combative range.

Sen

(先) (1) "First move", is synonymous with [sente](#) and [sen \(w\) o toru](#). (2) "Previous; former."

Sen (w) o toru

(先を取る) "Take the lead" (initiative) and attack by anticipating the opponent.

Sente

(先手) "First move, initiative." *Sente* refers to an attack used to seize the initiative against the opponent.

Setsunin-tō

(殺人刀) "The killing sword." In sword arts this does not refer to killing the opponent, but to killing their attacking spirit. By overwhelming the opponent's spirit they

are unable to attack or cope with attacks. Setsunin-tō is then a specific strategy for facing an opponent. “Setsunin-to is an egoistic and risky approach to combat—the slightest miscalculation will result in the swordsman walking straight into the opponent’s counter-attack”, Friday (1997). Setsunin-tō is the antithesis of [katsujin-ken](#).

Shidachi

(仕太刀) “The doing/serving sword.” The role of the “student” in the [nihon kendō no kata](#).

Shikake waza

(仕掛け技) Techniques to initiate a strike.

Shinai

(竹刀) “Bamboo sword.”

Shizentai

(自然体) The “natural body.” A natural (proper) posture, i.e., standing straight and extending the spine, shoulders back, arms hanging naturally, feet shoulder width, and the core engaged. [Migi](#) and [hidari shizentai](#) is when the right or left foot is forward, respectively, and the opposite shoulder is pulled slightly backward. This is not to be confused with a [hanmi kamae](#).

Suburi

(素振り) “Elementary swing.” Various swing practices or exercises which make up a fundamental part of basic [kendō](#). [Kendōka](#) will easily perform many thousands of practice strikes in their training, learning proper technique through repetition.

Sutemi

(捨て身) (lit.) “Sacrifice/abandon body/self”, often translated as “body abandoning”, i.e., ready to throw one’s life away. Sutemi refers to the mentality needed while striking, i.e., that one will either kill or be killed during the attempt and only by fully placing one’s life on the line, without hesitation or reservations, can a strike become truly effective.

T

Tachi

(太刀) “Long sword.” Used in the [nihon kendō no kata](#).

Tame

(溜め) (lit.) To “store, amass, accumulate.” AJKF (2011) defines tame as “the condition of being composed both mentally and physically and maintaining a spiritually replete state despite the tense situation.” In a basic sense tame is the continuation of [seme](#); one observes the opponent’s reaction(s) to seme while maintaining an attacking spirit. It has a broader meaning over the duration of a match: [kendōka](#) amass their spirit but have the patience to act at their own pace.

Ten no kamae

(天の構え) “Kamae of heaven.” See [jōdan no kamae](#).

Tobi-komi

(飛び込み) “Burst into.”

U

Uchidachi

(打太刀) “The striking sword” or “the presenting sword.” The role of “teacher” in the [nihon kendō no kata](#).

W

Waki-gamae

(脇構え) “Side stance.” Known as the “kamae of metal”, or [yō no kamae](#), it’s a variant of [gedan no kamae](#).

Waza

(技) “Technique(s).” Fencing techniques used against an opponent.

Y

Yagyū Shinkage-Ryū

(柳生新陰流) Yagyū Shinkage-Ryū is one of the oldest [kenjutsu](#) schools in Japan. Descendant from Shinkage-Ryū, founded by Kamiizumi Nobutsuna, the Yagyū Shinkage-Ryū was founded by Yagyū Munetoshi and is still practiced today.

Yin-yang

(陰陽) Individually the characters are read as [in-yō](#) in Japanese, this term is from Chinese Taoism dealing with opposites and/or duality; the definition of one is dependent on the definition of its opposite. The idea of yin-yang also embodies the idea of a dynamic balance of opposites or opposing aspects throughout nature, e.g., still/moving, negative/positive, defense/attack, etc...

Yō no kamae

(陽の構え) “Attacking kamae.” The antithesis of [in no kamae](#). See [waki-gamae](#).

Z

Zanshin

(残心) “Remaining mind.” In the context of [kendō](#) this is, simply put, interpreted as sustaining both mental and physical readiness with every action in order to be able to respond or cope with the opponent; a sustained alertness.

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