

## Applying Kendo no Kata in Shinai Kendo

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It can be difficult, especially for beginners, to parse the information from the kata and apply it to shinai kendo as this requires a firm grasp of several complicated concepts, the understanding of which depends heavily on experience, such as seme, tame, the san sappo, and the mitsu no sen. While 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 kendo. This often relegates kata to something kendoka have to learn “just for grading”.

While there will be overlap between kata, the following were chosen as examples to be the simplest way in which the applications can be seen.

This article assumes familiarity with the kendo no kata as well as several Japanese terms related to the kendo no kata and shinai kendo. All of this is in the descriptions and glossary of the “Nihon Kendo no Kata & Kihon Bokuto Waza - Study Guide”, found [here](#).

PRINCIPLES OF THE KENDO NO KATA APPLIED TO VARIOUS SHINAI KENDO SITUATIONS

Application	Tachi Kata							Kodachi Kata		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3
Beginner kendo	✓									
Key aspects of zanshin	✓						✓	✓		
Applying basic seme			✓							
Seme-tame						✓				
Dealing with aggressive opponents							✓			✓
Dealing with defensive opponents				✓					✓	
Fighting against jodan					✓	✓		✓		
Effective oji waza		✓								
Resisting seme							✓			

Application	Notes
Beginner kendo	<p>Tachi kata #1 teaches sen, seme, correct maai, sutemi, zanshin. Both uchidachi and shidachi initially approach one another with a sense of spiritually building their intent to strike.</p> <p><b>Shinai kendo:</b> Beginners should focus on the basics of attacking, fully committing to their strike, and ignoring their apprehension of being struck. Approach the opponent with the physical and spiritual intent to strike.</p>

<p><b>Application</b> Key aspects of zanshin</p>	<p><b>Notes</b> 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. Tachi kata #7 (as in all kata) enforces shidachi maintaining eye contact with uchidachi throughout their oji waza and during their movement(s) after the strike (physical zanshin), all while maintaining their fighting connection toward uchidachi. However in this particular kata, maintaining eye contact dictates <i>how</i> 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 them. Kodachi kata #1 has shidachi engaging uchidachi with an overwhelming spirit after their strike, maintaining eye contact and connection with uchidachi. <b>Shinai kendo:</b> 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. 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 mentally disconnecting from the opponent. Instead after striking an opponent adapt the basic drill-like movements to maintain eye contact and your connection with them. There is no such thing as partial zanshin; it's 100% or 0% – you either have zanshin or you don't.</p>
<p><b>Application</b> Applying basic seme</p>	<p><b>Notes</b> Tachi kata #3 has shidachi moving forward with a strong spirit, even though uchidachi controls center after parrying their attack(s). The constant pressuring of their maai pressures them both spiritually and physically until their kamae crumbles. In shinai kendo this would be the point at which shidachi could attack. <b>Shinai kendo:</b> For basic seme, kendoka simply move forward confidently and attack, embodying the feeling of being unstoppable.</p>
<p><b>Application</b> Seme-tame</p>	<p><b>Notes</b> Shidachi applies seme at three distinct points, but in a continuous fashion, while maintaining their focus and readiness throughout. 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 perform a counter attack. <b>Shinai kendo:</b> 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. Have tame and attack when the opponent exposes themselves.</p>

**Application**

Dealing with aggressive opponents

**Notes**

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 matches their spirit. With spirits equal and in seme-ai, shidachi gives 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 is positioning themselves to apply seme. Shidachi, maintaining focus, forgoes their original intent and adapts to uchidachi's strike attempt(s).

**Shinai kendo:** 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 go sen no sen. 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. Patiently set your trap and then give them the bait; an opening. Manipulate them to attack when you dictate but be calm enough to be able to adapt your counter attack(s) according to what the opponent does (go sen no sen).

**Application**

Dealing with defensive opponents

**Notes**

In tachi kata #4 uchidachi assumes hasso no kamae, or in no kamae. In, from in-yo, corresponds to waiting, defense, stillness, etc...Shidachi assumes waki-gamae, or yo no kamae. Yo corresponding to moving, attacking, etc...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 kendo:** The key idea here is, like an aggressive opponent, you must manipulate the opponent by giving them what they want most. For a defensive opponent they want to defend against your strike, either by blocking or by waiting to attempt an oji waza. Using patient aggressiveness, pressure the opponent forcing them to retreat, use feints to draw out a desperate oji waza attempt or a block, and then strike the target that opens because of this. 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, i.e., apply kyo-jitsu. When they attempt their desperate strike, counter them.

Application	Notes
Fighting against jodan	<p>Tachi kata #5 has shidachi alter their kamae to seigan no kamae. This covers their kote and leaves men open somewhat. Shidachi, from this kamae, is also easily able to apply seme toward uchidachi's left kote. Uchidachi, threatened by shidachi's pressure toward their kote, and now with limited target options attacks the only viable target left to them: men. Shidachi is able to counter.</p> <p>In tachi kata#6 shidachi invades uchidachi's maai with strong spirit, threatening an attack toward uchidachi's left kote. Uchidachi is unable to stay in the jodan position under this pressure and is forced to retreat. This is not just an empty step forward to close distance.</p> <p>In kodachi kata #1 shidachi forces uchidachi to attack due to their threat of tobi-komi waza. In essence they spiritually dominated uchidachi and are able to control them, forcing them to attack as they dictate.</p> <p><b>Shinai kendo:</b> The most important idea here is that one must spiritually dominate the jodan player. The jodan 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 chudan player. A correct seigan is the first step. This limits the targets available to the jodan player to (easily) strike, while at the same time directs the kensen toward the most easily accessible, and closest, target on a jodan player: their left kote. Next their maai must be invaded. The longer one allows a jodan player to be comfortable at their distance, the more likely they will be able to create or find an opening to strike. The chudan player has to take sen and move in on them. But they must move in with a strong spirit, threatening an attack vs. just moving forward. The jodan player is always looking for the chudan player to act defensively, either by blocking or looking to perform an oji waza. If the chudan player has defense on their mind, the jodan player <i>will</i> be able to manipulate them into protecting their men or kote and then strike which whichever target opens. The chudan player must move in with the intent to strike at any opportunity the jodan players spirit flatters, i.e., tobi komi waza, not with the intent to counter attack. Once this approach against the jodan 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.</p>

**Application**

Efficient oji waza

**Notes**

**Shinai kendo:** Tachi kata #2 shows shidachi can evade an attack with minimal movement, making the movements for oji waza much more efficient. However this requires two things: (1) shidachi to be patient and wait for uchidachi to commit to their strike. In essence, shidachi has to allow themselves to be exposed or in danger, in order for uchidachi to commit to a strike before they can successfully perform an oji waza against an opponent of equal skill. (2) Shidachi must lure out the attack by uchidachi by threatening with one of their own.

Combining both (1) and (2), oji waza have to be done as a proactive waza, not a reactive one. *Reaction is always slower than pro-action.* Press as if to strike with shikake waza and observe the opponent. If they are caught off guard, attack. However if they are pressured and react by striking, *let them attempt to strike you.* Once they commit, counter attack them. If your oji waza are physically efficient, i.e., no wasted or unnecessarily large escape or parry motions, as in the kata, there is plenty of time to strike the opponent. Don't rush, be patient.

**Application**

Resisting seme

**Notes**

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 kendo:** How resist seme, e.g., how to combat the use of kata #1, 3, 5, 6, etc... against you? Maintain a calm, focused composure. 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. Once this is done, your spirit and focus must increase to match the opponents, at which point both enter into seme-ai, i.e., both exert pressure equally. This does not mean to try and match their pace or their rhythm as this is how they want to react; to dictate the pace you take during the encounter. To control you. It means to have a strong spirit, be ready, have sen, etc... and to hold on to these (tame).

Once in this seme-ai, the opponent can be manipulated as an aggressive or defensive opponent depending on their reactions. The key is calm patience, while maintaining sen, seme, tame, kamae, and in the most general sense of the terms zanshin and ki ken tai ichi.

At seme-ai 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, and attempt to manipulate them into making an error or taking on a pace that you dictate. When all else fails, go back to beginner kendo: tachi kata #1 — attack with full commitment!