

The Mitsu no Sen in Kendo no Kata & Shinai Kendo

Creating an Advantageous Opportunity to Strike

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Outline

Terms

Beginner Strikes

3rd Dan Striking

4th Dan+ Striking

Striking in the Kendo no Kata

What are the Mitsu no Sen For?

Strategic Attacking & Control: Traditional Ryuha

Mitsu no Sen: The Three (Advantageous) Opportunities

The Mitsu no Sen as Used in the Kata

Terms

Sen “*Initiative*”. In Kendo, taking the initiative to attack.

Sente “*First attack*” to prevent or obstruct an anticipated action by taking action ahead of time.

Seme “*Attack*”, usually referred to as pressure. Pressure put on the opponent by projecting, *and the opponent perceiving*, one’s intent to attack.

Seme-ai “Balanced/mutual” seme. Both opponents are actively *attempting* to apply seme.

Terms (cont.)

Seme-kuzushi “*Unbalancing*” seme. The “straw breaks the camels back” of opponent’s composure. Unable to resist they react, e.g., attack, block, run away, hesitate, etc...

Tame “*Amass, hold onto*”. Refers to maintaining: (1) mental ability, (2) spiritual ability, and (3) physical ability to attack while under pressure. Tame is the natural continuation of applying seme.

Seme–Tame: “Approach the opponent with the spirit of ‘I am attacking’, and wait to see their reaction to determine which target to strike.” – Chiba Masashi

Terms (cont.)

Kyo-jitsu “*Truth (Jitsu) & Illusion/falsehood (Kyo)*”. In Kendo this refers to two concepts: (1) being in a state of readiness (truth)/unready (false) and (2) strategies to lure the opponent into attacking.

Katsujin-ken/setsunin-to “Life-giving sword” & “killing sword”. Usually used to describe ethical ideas, but in fact they refer to generalized approaches (in Kendo) of combating an opponent.

Terms (cont.)

Shikake waza Techniques used to initiate an attack.

Tobi-komi “*Burst in*”. A high spirited shikake waza used when the spirit of the opponent falters.

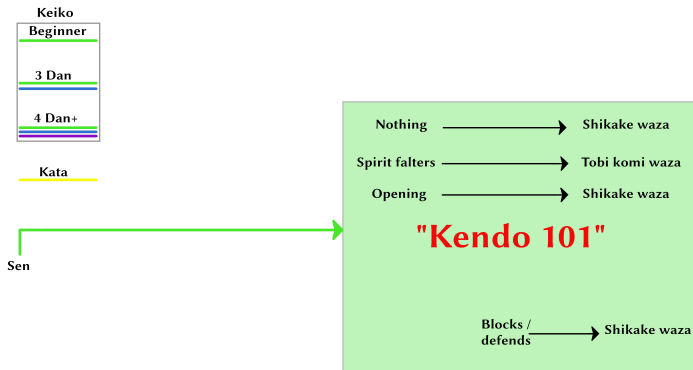
Oji waza Techniques used to counter an attack from the opponent.

Beginner Striking

Sen→ Kendo 101

Beginners are encouraged to attack almost exclusively. Don't block, don't focus on oji waza (for now), just attack. Don't know what to do? Attack men. *Throw yourself at the opponent.*

Beginner Striking

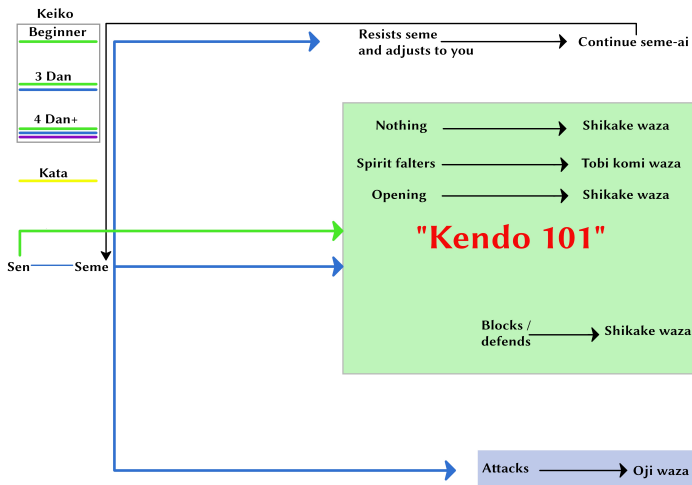


3rd Dan Striking

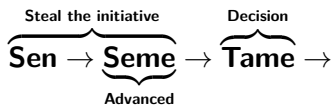
Sen→ **Seme**→

- (1) Kendo 101,
- (2) Oji Waza, or
- (3) Choose not to go (yet) and pressure more.

3rd Dan Striking



4th Dan+ Striking



(1) Maintains composure

(a) Opponent resists seme → continue seme-ai,

(2) Opponent threatened

(a) Opponent gives opening → shikake waza,

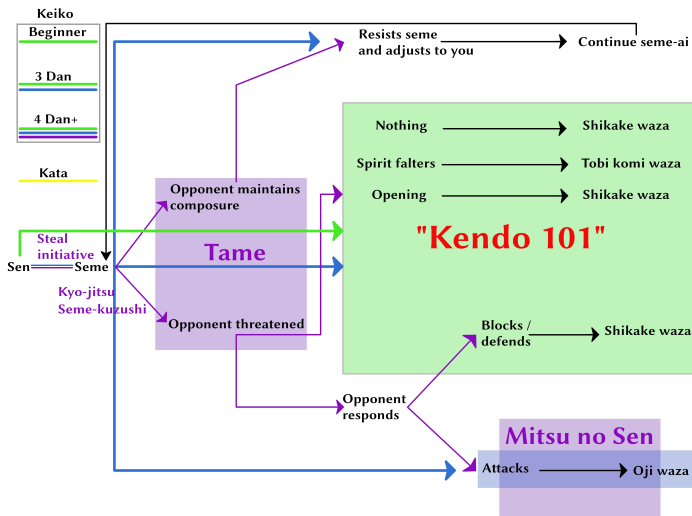
(b) Spirit falters → tobi-komi waza,

(c) Opponent defends/blocks → shikake waza,

(d) Opponent attacks → oji waza.

Note: (2d) at 4D implies *basic* use of the mitsu no sen, similar to 3D and seme.

4th Dan+ Striking



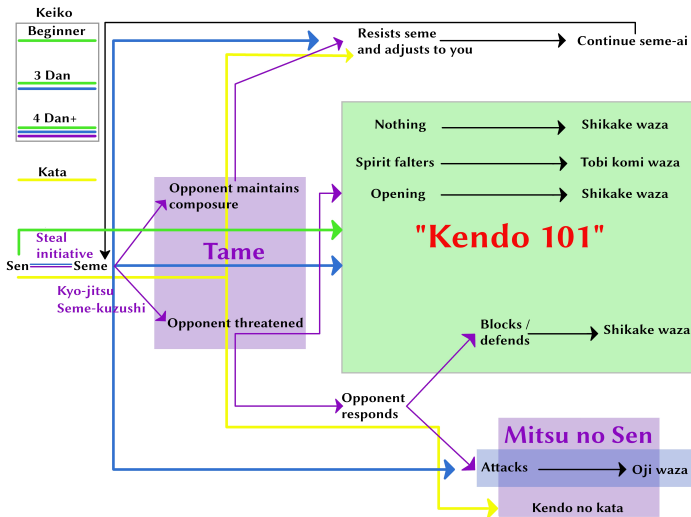
Striking in the Kendo no Kata

The tachi kata encompass the 4th Dan+ route for striking:



The opponent (uchidachi) may react in many ways, or multiple times, but eventually they respond with a strike that is countered via the mitsu no sen.

Kendo no Kata



What are the Mitsu no Sen For?

When can we attack in kendo?

- Opportunity
1. Randomly. *Unreliable at best.*
 2. As opponent hesitates. *Inherently risky.*
 3. When they attack us. *A guaranteed opening!*

How do we use the opening our opponent gives us as they attack?

Strategy The MnS tell us *when* we have an *advantageous* opportunity and give us a context to create a strategy to *force these opportunities*.

Goal: Control the opponent and dictate when their attacks occur.

Strategic Attacking & Control: Traditional Ryuha

This is alluded to in the Kashima-Shinryu (c. 1500) via *Katsujin-ken* & *Setsunin-to*:

The “sword,” in both cases refers not to the weapon itself but to its usage; and it is not the opponent himself who is killed or given life, but his responses and fighting spirit. When a combatant uses force of will to overpower, immobilize, and strike down an opponent before he can react, this is called “setsunin-tō” (i.e. “sword[sman]ship that transfixes,” or “swordsmanship that kills response”). “*Katsujin-ken*” (“Sword[sman]ship that animates”), on the other hand, involves drawing out the opponent, inducing him to strike, and then going inside his technique, countering it either at the moment of its origination or at the point of its most complete extension. Setsunin-tō is an egoistic and risky approach to combat—the slightest miscalculation will result in the swordsman walking straight into his opponent’s counterattack. *Katsujin-ken*, by contrast, involves a sophisticated manipulation of the opponent and his actions by means of utter selflessness; properly conducted, it is virtually undefeatable.³⁰

Legacies of the Sword: The Kashima-Shinryu & Samurai Martial Culture, Karl F. Friday, 1997

Strategic Attacking & Control: Traditional Ryuha

The “three kinds of initiative” are also present in Musashi’s Niten Ichi Ryu (c. 1604-1640)

In *Go Rin no Sho* the MnS are given under the names *Tai tai no sen* (body-body), *Tai no sen* (waiting), and *Ken no sen* (suspend/depends on/advance).

Crucially, Musashi indicates:

“With these three types of initiative, depending on the occasion and according to principle, you may not always be the one to attack first; however, just as when you do attack first, you want to move the opponent around at will.”

The Five Rings: Miyamoto Musashi’s Art of Strategy, M. Musashi, trans. David K. Groff, 2012

Mitsu no Sen: The Three (Advantageous) Opportunities

Sen no sen Taking the initiative when opponent is *about to act* (sente) and striking first.



Sen no sen

Go no sen "Waiting" until the opponent acts, recognizing their action, and responding.



Go sen no sen

Sensen no sen Forcing opponent to act in a *particular way or perceiving their action before hand* and using this foreknowledge to lure out their known action and respond.



Sen sen no sen

The Mitsu no Sen as Used in the Kata

KATA & THE MITSU NO SEN		
Tachi Kata		
Kata	Uchidachi	Shidachi
#1	Sen no sen	Sen sen no sen
#2	Sen no sen	Sen sen no sen
#3	Sente	Sen sen no sen
#4	Sente	Go sen no sen
#5	Sen no sen	Sen sen no sen
#6	Sen no sen	Go sen no sen
#7	Sente	Go sen no sen

How does shidachi use these opportunities? What does this mean?
How do they create one?

Shidachi Setting up an Opportunity

1. Uchidachi and shidachi start in seme-ai.
2. Shidachi lures, invites, or forces uchidachi to attack them.
3. Uchidachi, perceiving shidachi is attempting sente or sees an opening in their defense:
 - a attacks attempting sen no sen or,
 - b attempts sente if they see an opening, respectively.
4. Shidachi, creating an opening, responds.

It is the method(s) in each kata used to create opportunities that are directly applicable to shinai kendo.

Some Examples of Specific Triggers in the Kata

- Ipponme** From seme-ai, shidachi makes a slight downward movement as if about to cut, hence drawing out the uchidachi's men strike. Shidachi uses nuki waza through sensen no sen.
- Nihonme** From seme-ai, shidachi slightly presses uchidachi's sword to the left, as if taking center prior to striking, inviting uchidachi to strike kote. Shidachi uses nuki waza through sensen no sen.
- Ropponme** Shidachi pressures from seme-ai three times: (1) shifting from gedan to chudan forcing uchidachi to retreat into jodan, (2) threatening uchidachi's kote, via seigan, forcing their retreat to chudan, and (3) pressing uchidachi's bokuto while assuming ai-chudan, taking center, forcing a hasty kote. Shidachi uses suri-age waza through go no sen.