

3-3. 4th dan~5th dan

Kendoka who reaches this level is called senior or Senpai. They are expected to have developed their ability to read their opponent's mind (intentions), to deal with information in various situations and to make decisions. Kendoka at this level should also be able to use various Waza according to the situations without thinking. They are the stage that starts practicing to acquire Kendo that dominates the opponent's Chu-shin (center) by small Shinai and body movements and controls the opponent by making use of the opponent's intentions and movements. Kendoka at this level should place more emphasis on attacking after dominating the Chu-shin with rational and economic Shinai control and footwork. That does not mean to restrain their Shinai control and footwork excessively and immediately. You should gradually change your Kendo from relying on the physical ability to the Kendo that controls the opponent by small movements and the inner action of Ki. At this level, it is recommended that the ratio of the use of Shikake-waza to Oji-waza should be 60 % to 40 %. It is important to maintain good body balance so that you can move in any direction smoothly keeping your Hikagami (back of the left knee) a bit tensed (not too much, just enough). The proper tension of Hikagami, acting like a rubber band, allows you to kick the floor anytime without doing Tsugi-ashi (to pull left foot close to the right foot before attacking). When you keep these points in your mind during Jigeiko, and if you feel or get a cramp in your left leg, then it means that you have not previously been using your left leg correctly and that you have just now started using it correctly. What you must avoid is embarrassed feeling when being struck by your opponent, because this is caused by having too much pride in the fact that you are 4th dan or 5th dan. You are supposed to develop your Kendo by being struck. It is important not to hesitate to use big Waza and to use it as soon as you see an opportunity. There are some 4th dan and 5th dan who stick only to Men and do not use other Waza. It is still important in Jigeiko to try to use all the waza you have. Especially in Tsubazeriai, there are some who do not pay attention and lose their concentrations. It is important to keep concentrating and prepare yourself to attack whenever you see the opportunity.

3-4. 6th dan~

It is not possible for me to describe how Jigeiko should be done at this level because I have just become 6th dan. Therefore, I would like to refer to "Michi no kaori" written by Masatake Sumi, Hanshi 8th dan, and discuss how Jigeiko at this level should be. Kendoka who reaches this level is called Sensei. Sumi Sensei (2000) points out that Kendoka at this level should not be arrogant, but be modest and have a desire to improve themselves even if they become 6th dan. In Jigeiko, it is needless to say that Kendoka at this level is required to show further rational and economic Shinai and body movement. Kendoka who have reached 6th dan and above are usually at least middle-aged or older. That means their physical abilities are now lower than in their younger days; therefore, they cannot move and use the Shinai as quickly as they did before. It is important to try to compensate for the decline of your physical abilities by further improvement of your Ki and Waza. Sumi Sensei (2000) also points out that Kendoka at this level should try to change their Kendo from one which initiates an aggressive attack to one that attacks when the opponent is about to attack (dehana). He also encourages them to practice not only straight attacking Waza but also Suriage-waza using Tai-sabaki moving diagonally sideways. At this level, it is more important to read the opponent's intention and movement and to practice reacting properly in comparison with before. Sumi Sensei (2000) explains an importance of acquiring Dehana-waza during the workout for yourself in Jigeiko. For example, what situation and how you should move to break the opponent's balance, upset the opponent and lure the opponent into where you wish the opponent to attack, as it is often difficult for Kendoka at this level, compared with lower grades, to have the chance to get advice from other people. It is necessary always to reflect after each Jigeiko on how you performed with the opponent in the process of attacking, defending and counterattacking. For Kendoka at this level, Sumi Sensei (2000) also suggests one of the methods for a Jigeiko. You decide on only one target you can attack, and on only one Waza you can use. Then you use that Waza against any opponent and any Waza the opponent is about to use and in any situation in that Jigeiko (however it should not be just Men!). That is for acquiring the timing of Waza you would like to acquire. The way to acquire the timing of each Waza is never supposed to be easy. Sumi Sensei (2000, p. 202) also explains that there are a lot of things for Kendoka at this level to consider. Consider how to take your Kamae, how to keep your balance, where and how much to tense up or relax your muscles, how to breathe, and what type of Shinai to choose and so on. In the end, what he says comes back to the same important points in Kihon-geiko and Kata-geiko. That proves the importance of the connection between Kihon-geiko, Kata-geiko, and Jigeiko. Kendo requires Shugyo (修行, training) throughout your life. There is no exit or easy way out in your training. Kihon-geiko and Kata-geiko should not be neglected even if you reach high grades such as 6th dan and 7th dan. Then it is just as important to tackle Jigeiko while considering how to use Waza we have acquired in Kihon-geiko and Kata-geiko.

4. Summary

So far the importance of the connection between Kihon-geiko, Kata-geiko and Jigeiko, and how Jigeiko should be approached at each level has been discussed. In the next article, therefore, what attitudes should be taken in Jigeiko and how to tackle Jigeiko with various types of opponents will be covered, and the examples on how to tackle Jigeiko with lower grades, higher grades, the same grades, someone much older, women and so on will be discussed.

References

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The Article Part 2

Introduction

In the previous article, I discussed the relationship between Jigeiko, Kihon-geiko, and Kata-geiko and examined how Jigeiko should be approached. I only mentioned in general, how Jigeiko should be done at each level; elementary, intermediate and advanced. In this article, I would like to discuss how one should approach Jigeiko when confronted by different types of Kendoka, focusing on the following; namely, Jigeiko with someone senior, junior, of the same level, older, or of the opposite sex.

1. Jigeiko with Seniors

What should be mentioned, firstly, is to try to get Sho-dachi (the first cut) no matter with whom you are having the Jigeiko, irrespective of the difference in rank and experience. Jigeiko should start with Ippon Shobu played seriously in an equal fifty-fifty situation, with the philosophy that there is no second chance in a fight with real swords. It is important to understand this philosophy in Kendo as Budo and try to get a successful Sho-dachi by utilizing all of your abilities to the full. After attacking and defending Sho-dachi, in this Jigeiko with someone senior, you are recommended then to focus mainly on Shikake-waza. However, this does not mean merely attacking randomly against seniors. If you are of a low rank such as 1-kyu or Sho-dan, it is important to attempt to break the senior's Chu-shin [center] by making the best use of your footwork, Shinai, and body movement. It is also important not to be afraid of being avoided and counterattacked, and not to stop attacking in the middle of your action, but to always try to complete your attack. You are supposed to develop various ways of Shikake-waza despite being avoided or being repeatedly struck by Debanawaza and Ōji-waza. However, it is not profitable for you to be struck as a result of waiting for the senior to attack you. Try to use all the Waza you have and give 100 percent effort. Sumi Sensei (2000) points out that juniors should focus only on Shikake-waza and try to do Jigeiko that makes them use up all of their energy in 5 minutes when they have Jigeiko with a senior. If you are 2nd dan, 3rd dan or 4th dan, you should focus more on developing a way of dominating the Chu-shin by using less footwork and Shinai movement against seniors. It is important to attempt to dominate the Chu-shin, by using various ways and not just using the same way. But it is still important to try to strike fully without being afraid of a senior's counter attack. Summarizing this section, whatever your rank is, it is important to focus on your Shikake-waza when you do Jigeiko with a senior. After doing Jigeiko with them, always reflect on how your Seme worked against them and what you need to do when practicing Shikake-waza in the next Jigeiko.

2. Jigeiko with Juniors

There is no need to stress the importance of Sho-dachi here anymore. What you should consider when doing Jigeiko with a junior is not to lapse into a Jigeiko that you intend to satisfy only by merely beating them. People tend to feel that they want to impress other people who are watching their Jigeiko. Such vanity should be severely admonished. As a senior, you have a responsibility to develop the junior's skills by making them realize their weak points by striking them in that weak moment, but also by letting their strong points come through by letting them strike you during the Jigeiko. This type of Keiko is called **Hikitate-geiko** (All Japan Kendo Federation, 2000) and is one of the most difficult Keiko to do in Kendo. Juniors will lose their enthusiasm and concentration if seniors just keep on striking them for their satisfaction or if the opportunity to strike is too obvious. Seniors are expected to perform as if their skill level is 1/2 dan higher than the junior to enable the junior to improve and to concentrate 100 percent when facing them.

The seniors should counterattack when the juniors make an attack without first making an effective Seme and when there was no appropriate opportunity, but let them strike when they come to attack after making a good Seme and when there is a good opportunity. Seniors should encourage juniors to grasp and understand the correct opportunities to strike through this Hikitate-geiko. Seniors are also expected to encourage juniors to understand the importance of maintaining concentration by attacking when juniors are careless after their attacks. There is an old saying that explains how a senior should approach Jigeiko with a junior: “**Ware igai mina shi nari**, 我以外皆師成り” (everyone but me is my teacher). That is, there is always something to learn through Jigeiko no matter with whom one does Jigeiko. One quite often hears, I am the highest rank in my Dojo, and I have no one to teach me – This is not true. It depends on the way you think. Keep in mind that you can learn a great deal from whoever you do Jigeiko with. It is often taken for granted that seniors can strike juniors easily in Jigeiko, so for your further improvement, you should not just focus on striking but tackle Jigeiko with a clear task(s) or by giving yourself a handicap in this Jigeiko with juniors. However, you must not stick to a form of Jigeiko whereby you only focus on cutting Men for instance. As even if you try to focus on cutting Men, you need to have a clear idea, for example, from what distance to cut Men and on how to make an opportunity. As to giving yourself a handicap, it is also important to explore how to perform under adverse conditions. For example, dare to face in Chika-ma during Jigeiko with someone smaller than you and watch for a chance of doing Debana-waza (instead of waiting, you should try to lure your opponent into attacking the target you want them to strike!). I would like to repeat the point that seniors must not lapse into Jigeiko that you intend to satisfy only by merely beating them.

3. Jigeiko with Someone on the Same Level

Jigeiko with someone of the same level gives you a good opportunity to reflect on your progress and the fruits of your efforts. It is even better if you are both about the same age. It is very important for you to know someone of the same level and age, and to do Jigeiko with them. It's quite normal that you do not want to be struck by this rival, but it is very important to have an attitude that you try to show your best Kendo no matter what happens. People tend to return the attack right away before making enough Seme after they are struck. It is important to control this feeling of attacking without enough Seme and to try taking or retaking the Chu-shin. You should compare how your Seme and Waza, which worked ok against juniors, work against someone of the same level and find out there is anything your rival has but you don't and vice versa by doing Jigeiko. It is expected that all the same level people will try to train harder to improve Kendo in the way of Shugyo with the spirit of mutual support and friendships.

4. Jigeiko with the Old

Here, the difference in age is considered rather than the difference in grade. This section is about attitudes to Jigeiko with someone old. It is strictly prohibited to do powerful Tai-atari and Tsuki to an older adult in Jigeiko. However, there may be some older adults who are bigger and have more power than you. In that case, then, it might be okay to some extent, to use your power and weight against them. If that is not the case, then, direct physical contacts that rely on strength using Seme and Waza should be restrained. That does not mean cutting corners in the Jigeiko. It is still important to try to complete your strike and to strike again in response to your opponents when their first strike is inadequate [but without Tai-atari or relying on physical power]. It is up to you to decide whether you can have a worthwhile Jigeiko with an older adult despite the age difference. Old Kendo-ka who has great experiences may not be able to use many types of Waza, and their speed and power may be inferior, but they have a brilliant ability to read the situation (opponent's intention, movement, Waza and so on). Old Kendo-ka is a model of lifetime participation in Kendo. We will receive many suggestions on how we should tackle Kendo by observing old high-rank Kendo-ka doing Jigeiko or by having Jigeiko with them. We will be able to enjoy kendo throughout our lives just like them.

5. Men Doing Jigeiko with Women

In the case of men doing Jigeiko with women, Tai-atari and the use of Waza that rely on physical power should also be restrained. Men should not fall into the habit of being afraid of being struck by women or getting frustrated when you cannot strike as you wish. This habit causes you to strike ignoring opportunities, differences in physique and physical strength. That is the worst type of Kendo because it shows no respect for your opponent and creates nothing between you and your opponent, even if you can strike your opponent by doing such Kendo in the Jigeiko. Your opponent is not an enemy to destroy; rather, she is your partner who should help each other to improve by working together in the spirit of Shugyo.

It can quite often be the case that you are much taller when doing Jigeiko with women and juniors. That is a good opportunity to do Jigeiko in Chika-ma [if there is a difference of height between two Kendo-ka, the one who is taller feels cramped normally and uncomfortable playing in this close distance]. Men should realize that having Jigeiko with women is a good opportunity to learn how to play (without relying too much on physical strength) by facing in Chika-ma. Moreover, men can practice how to acquire the timing of Debana-waza that catches the moment when your opponent comes to move to Chika-ma through this Jigeiko with women.

6. Women Doing Jigeiko with Men

It is often thought that most women find it difficult to do Jigeiko with men who are bulkier and taller. Just imagine the thought that powerful, well-built men may be scary when they attack. However, everyone has a weak point. For instance, there is Ma-ai (distance) or a type of opponent which they may find uncomfortable or awkward to fight. That applies not only to women but all Kendo-ka. Avoiding to practice with people who are hard for you to deal with in Jigeiko is not a solution because it will remain as your problem. If they are hard to deal with in Jigeiko, it is suggested that you should try to do Jigeiko with them more than with anyone else and try to overcome this weak point through being struck again and again and by trying to find a solution. If you find such people who are difficult to handle, then they are the ones with whom you need to do Jigeiko more to overcome your fear and problem. Tall people are not good at playing in Chika-ma because it is too close for them to kick the floor hard with their left foot and they feel cramped in this position. The important point is therefore how to reach Chika-ma, the distance that is advantageous for you. If you try to reach Chika-ma by merely stepping forward, your opponent will try to do a Debana-attack. It is important therefore to contrive various ways of getting Chika-ma from different directions. In the case when your opponent comes to attack before you do, you will be knocked over if you just check their attack and do Tai-atari. It is important, therefore, to acquire proper Ashi-sabaki and Tai-sabaki that enables you to avoid direct strong physical contact [using body movement]. I would like to add one piece of advice here. One sometimes hears, unfortunately, that some men behave in Jigeiko as if they are trying to hurt women. There is nothing to be learned from such people with this bad attitude in the Jigeiko. It is strongly recommended that you stop Jigeiko immediately if you discover your opponent is one of these types, or that you refuse to do Jigeiko with them if you are asked.

7. Last words

What should be expected of all Kendo-ka when doing Jigeiko, is that you make your opponents feel that they want to have Jigeiko with you again. It will give me great pleasure if this and the previous article, which reexamined the relationship between Kihon-geiko, Kata-geiko, Jigeiko, and how Jigeiko should be approached, give you something useful in your Kendo Shugyo now and in the future.

References

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