SHIN KI RYOKU ITTCHI - The Heart of Refined Kendo

The Genbukan was one of most popular and influential dojos in Edo during the BAKUMATSU period (1853 to 1868). Its founder **CHIBA SHUSAKU** is credited with first cataloguing and describing many of the waza used in modern day kendo, and was the founder of the very influential **Hokushin Itto ryu**.



The phrase "***Sore Ken Wa Shunsoku Shin Ki Ryoku No Ittchi"*** is inscribed as an epitaph at the foot of his grave. Legend has it that in his early twenties he was asked by a senior "what is the essence of Kendo?" The story goes that his reply was "The essence of kendo is **SHUNSOKU"** (Lightning like Speed). To explain further he used the term **SHIN KI RYOKU NO ITTCHI.**

SHIN - The heart of a thing. The core principle, philosophy or strategy

KI - Spiritual power. The mental drive needed to take an action to its conclusion without distraction.

RYOKU – Strength or physical power including KI KEN TAI ITCHI. All the physical aspects of the strike come together i.e. the shout of determination, the moment of impact and the positioning of the body (Timing, movement, posture).

ITTCHI - The three aspects: SHIN, KI and RYOKU are combined into one seamless entity. Core concepts are combined with spiritual power (determination) and a powerful refined physicality.

SHIN KI RYOKU NO ITTCHI represents a seamless combination of perception and reaction that manifests itself in a refined series of actions that are driven home with conviction and that exactly match the needs of the circumstances. Furthermore these actions occur spontaneously and without conscious intent.

The mind state of **MUSHIN** is a key factor in achieving this, as is an understanding of **KOUBUO ITTCHI** (Attack and defence as one).

When **SHIN KI RYOKU NO ITTCHI** is achieved the speed of delivery of the strike and its effectiveness will be like that of a lightning bolt.

SHIN - In kendo, speed is victory, however hurried actions tend to lack efficiency so although one may be going as fast as is physically possible the strike is sluggish and ineffective. When **SHIN KI RYOKU NO ITTCHI** occurs the strike commences before the thought to strike has formed. In other words, the circumstances where a strike will be effective are perceived before they occur. The necessary actions are autonomously set in motion so that even though they are performed fluidly, flexibly and naturally they arrive with alarming and devastating speed.

Further Important Concepts: If the circumstances where a strike will succeed are perceived rather than planned, and if the necessary actions are performed autonomously then it is essential to flow naturally with the circumstances rather than try to force a particular outcome. This requires integration of attack and defence (**KOUBOU ITTCHI**). When we consider the importance of integrating attack and defence what we are referring to is the importance of harmonising strategy and perception with effective action.
The state of mind for refined fencing is **MUSHIN** or no mind and this is essential if one wishes to take full advantage of the circumstances that may develop. **SHISHIN** (Stopped mind) is the opposite of this and refers to the situation where one is locked into one particular train of actions e.g. waiting for the opponent to attack so you can apply a particular counter or forcing an attack upon them even in the face of resistance because that is the waza you want to perform. In fact we should apply intense concentration but not seek to limit how we will react. To succeed it is important to have confidence in one's training and preparation and allow perception to flow freely into action. In refined fencing upon sensing an opportunity one should attack with the best waza for the set of circumstances. When an opponent seizes an opportunity they attack and we counter with the best waza for the circumstances. When there is no opportunity to act we apply strategy and remain patient until an opportunity presents itself.

It is most important to understand that the purpose of kendo practice is not to win matches or overcome opponents, but rather to improve one's spirit, one's mind and one's physical condition. This should not be a selfish act but one which benefits others.
It is also important that we do not seek to progress at the expense of others and since Kendo is a lifelong activity one need not be overly impatient to progress.

Because kendo is not only a physical activity, neither size, age or gender should unduly affect the outcome of a match. The time of the year and whether it is hot, cold wet or dry should not matter either.

KATTE UTSU, UTTE KATSUNA is a very important concept in refined kendo practice. It means "To win first, then strike rather than strike to win"
In order to do this we have to bring the opponent to a moment of crisis using SEME, and only then follow this up with a strike. Since the opponent has been effectively defeated (by the use of SEME) they are unable to resist or counter the strike effectively.

During a match one must not be impatient to win. There is a concept known as **KYO-JITSU.** This can be interpreted as empty and full i.e. empty of energy and intent (**KYO**), or full of energy and intent (**JITSU**). Moments will arise during a match that will allow an opportunity for victory. The opponent may be in a state of high energy or low energy when an opportunity arises. The opportunity may be for an attack or a counterattack. Trying to unduly force an opportunity means that one is unable to use perception effectively as the mind is clouded by the intention to strike or counter in a particular way(SHISHIN/UTTE KATSUNA). When we are unable to use Perception (**KAN** - our sixth sense) we generally misinterpret conditions and act inappropriately. This inevitably leads to defeat.

However! This does not mean that we simply have to wait for opportunities to occur. Rather we should have confidence in our developed skills, apply appropriate strategies and use our perception of the opponent's mental and physical state to take action using **SEME** and **KAESHI SEME** in order to unsettle them and gain an opportunity.

The Importance of SEME In Unsettling the Opponent:
In kendo we often refer to the **SHI-KAI** or the four sicknesses. These include: **KYO** (startle, surprise), **KU** (fear), **GI** (doubt) and **WAKU** (indecision). The aim of **SEME** is to develop these sicknesses in the opponent's mind and body. SEME then is not something that one does (an action); rather it is the effect that one's actions have on the opponent.

The highest form of seme is **KIZEME**. When a kenshi has achieved sufficient refinement of skill to be able to apply **KIZEME** it is not necessary to make any physical actions to unnerve and unsettle the opponent. The opponent becomes unnerved and shows weakness simply due to the relentless pressure induced by a relaxed perceptive opponent who is in harmony with their movements and actions. When fencing it should be considered a successful attack even if the opponent is only fleetingly drawn into one of the **SHI-KAI** (perhaps the weakness generated was not sufficient to allow for a physical attack, or the opponent simply moves to a blocking position).

SANSAPPO There are three kinds of seme:

- Seme against an opponent's ki (unsettle their spiritual power or determination – **KI O KOROSU**)
- Seme against an opponent's kensen (unsettle their sword or chamae – **KEN O KOROSU**)
- Seme against an opponent's waza or strategy (unsettle their ability to deliver an effective attack – **WAZA O KOROSU**)

All three should be applied in the most appropriate manner in order to break down the opponent's defences. This needs careful thought and considerable practice.

There Are Three Stages To Applying Seme:

KIZEME (The induced pressure of flexible mind contact applied throughout the match that breaks down the opponent's determination and ability to perceive opportunities)
SHOKUJIN (The moment one closes with the opponent. The kensen make contact and you take control of the opponent's sword and posture)
KOJIN (The two swords are crossed at the Uchi Maai and myriad attack or counter techniques and timings may be applied or suppressed). Moving to KOJIN with spirit and intent, and forcing an advantageous moment of crisis is the key to victory.

The Importance of Physical Preparation:

KI - As soon as a viable opportunity is perceived it is essential to attack with all of one's spiritual power and determination (**SUTEMI**). This is the KI element of the SHIN KI RYOKU. If we give 100% of our power to the strike, upon its completion we find that we still have 100% concentration of power. Hold back even the smallest part and there will be no finish to the waza (**ZANSHIN**), or sufficient power to press the attack to a successful conclusion (**RENZOKU WAZA**).

RYOKU - Even when the correct moment has been perceived and we have achieved 100% determination of intent it is still possible to fall short. The final aspect of total victory is the physical efficiency of the strike: **KI (Shout, determination), KEN (Hasuji, Datotsu Bu, Datotsu Bui, Sai, Te no uchi) TAI (Ashi sabaki, chamae, zanshin) ITTCHI**. These must come harmoniously and smoothly together in order to deliver the strike. It is not possible to achieve this without a great deal of practice and consideration.

SHODAN to SANDAN
For these grades it is enough to apply **KI RYOKU ITTCHI** in one's practice. Perfectly timed strikes driven home with maximum determination is all that is necessary to be successful. This is why we use **KIRI KAESHI** as an important indicator at this level.

YONDAN and Beyond
At this level the core principles become important. It is not enough to strike the opponent well. Rather it is necessary to strike the opponent at the correct moment and with an appropriate waza.
The effect of the SEME rather than its physical components become the key aspect of what is practiced and demonstrated. The depth and clarity of one's perception becomes critical as does the interaction between opponents.
Opportunities must be crafted and seized with determination and a lightning like effect.
This is **SHIN KI RYOKU NO ITTCHI**

SORE KEN WA SHUNSOKU

GaryO