

# Attitudes to Ji-geiko

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## - PART 1 -

### Introduction

Ji-geiko is the core part of keiko in kendo. In ji-geiko, we (kendo-ka) can try to use waza (techniques) in unrestricted situations. We can also learn and acquire what we need to do before we attack (seme) or how to react to an opponents seme (intention and attack). Through ji-geiko, moreover, we can recognise what waza we are or are not good at, and ones ji-geiko can lead us to the next kihon-geiko and ji-geiko and what we need to work on for our technical progression. It also gives us ways to develop our skills and spirit as proper kendo-ka.

If we approach ji-geiko in the wrong way such as focusing only on beating an opponent, we cannot expect real development as proper kendo-ka in the future. It is important, therefore, to engage in ji-geiko with the correct understanding.

Therefore the purpose of this article (part 1) is to re-examine what ji-geiko should be and to present some useful material for kendo-ka in future keiko. It starts with an examination of the relationship between kihon-geiko, kata-geiko and ji-geiko followed by an examination of how ji-geiko should be practised.

### 1. The Relationship between kihon-geiko, kata-geiko and ji-geiko

As well as ji-geiko, kihon-geiko and kata-geiko are important main elements of keiko.

In kihon-geiko, the same practice is repeated again and again under pre-determined situations so that we become proficient in striking and thrusting correctly, with full kiai and good posture (ki-ken-tai no ichi).

Kata-geiko places more emphasis on being aware of the use of the sword than kihon-geiko, [as kata-geiko is also usually practiced with boken]. Kata-geiko is also where we learn how to breathe (abdominal breathing) properly.

These kihon-geiko, kata-geiko and ji-geiko do not exist separately. They are supposed to be connected fundamentally. However, there are some people who can perform beautifully in kihon-geiko and kata-geiko, but lose posture and co-ordination between their arms and legs in ji-geiko. There is no real problem, if these people are setting themselves task(s) in order to overcome their inabilities in the ji-geiko.

There are other people, however, who focus only on beating opponents and striking more times than their opponent has. This sort of attitude in ji-geiko reflects an attitude that is concerned only with winning at that precise moment in time. In contrast, there are other people who focus only on their posture and form and pay less attention to the exchanging of taking chushin and seme-ai. (control of the centre). This is also OK, if these people are doing intentionally in order to overcome their problems (i.e. trying to keep their back straight when they attack). If they are not trying to overcome their various problems however, then all such attitudes degrade ji-geiko into just a performance and therefore we cannot experience the real pleasure of ji-geiko through this failing.

## **2. What ji-geiko Should Be**

There should not be an imbalance of preference between kihon-geiko, kata-geiko and ji-geiko. It is important to tackle ji-geiko while we are considering how to use waza acquired in kihon-geiko and kata-geiko. By doing so, we can grasp the meaning and purpose of each keiko and become more interested each time we practice any keiko. As mentioned earlier, ji-geiko is aimed at giving us opportunities to grasp our abilities under unrestricted situations. In addition to this, Tomiki (1991) points out that the purpose of ji-geiko in modern kendo is to allow us to grasp the strict spiritual aspects of kendo as budo. In the past, bujutsu-ka could grasp their abilities only by beating their opponents and surviving life or death situations. The place of battle for life or death in the past has been converted to a competitive place where everyone is protected with bogu and one can attack and defend safely. In modern kendo, the kendo-ka is expected to try to control emotional conflict in competitive situations. Thus, developing our skills and spirit as proper kendo-ka, it is essential then to understand how to undertake ji-geiko and do it properly. The way of approaching ji-geiko is not the same for everyone. At the beginner's stage, there is a way for them to engage in ji-geiko according to their level. Likewise, there is also a way for seniors to approach ji-geiko according to their level. Moreover, the application of ji-geiko changes according to what a person tries to acquire and improve through ji-geiko and also who we have ji-geiko with (i.e. with kohai, sempai, someone older, women and so on).

The remainder of this article explains how to tackle ji-geiko according to one's stage of development.

## **3. How to Tackle Ji-geiko in Each development Stage**

**3-1. Kyu Grade.** Firstly, the most important point for kendo-ka of this level to keep in mind is: to try to use waza (shikake-waza) on your own initiative. It should not be just men and kote, but you should use all waza you have learnt in kihon-geiko and kata-geiko. You should not be afraid of failing and being de-

feated. It is expected that you will gradually grasp the timing of using each waza whilst you try to attack using your own initiative. Another important point is that you should not stop your movement after striking and thrusting, but try to complete your attack and quickly prepare yourself for the next action. It is quite often seen in beginners ji-geiko that they lose their attention and guard as soon as they finish their first attack and that they walk back to where they were before attacking. It is important to always maintain concentration wherever you are and to prepare for the next action as soon as you have finished your first attack.

Secondly, it is usual that most beginners have not learnt, at this stage, how to defend. It is also quite often the case that beginners do not properly know what to do and they are just absent-mindedly standing without doing anything, closing their eyes and tensing their shoulders, moving back or running away in case their opponent attacks before them. It is also reasonable to assume that they may feel fear at someone's attack. What is important here is to have a proper understanding of ko-bo-ichi and ken-tai-ichi. These terms illustrate the importance of always being mentally and physically ready to defend against the opponent's counterattack whilst attacking, and ready to counterattack while defending (All Japan Kendo Federation, 2000, p. 47). There is no defence just for the sake of defence in kendo. Defence is done for the next attack or counterattack. Using a proper defence enables you to immediately attack after defending, but you should not just be standing and defending by using only your shinai, you should keep your knees relaxed and defend by using both your shinai and your footwork. As you gain more experience, you come to acquire a wider variety of waza and better timing. What you are encouraged to do for your progression at this stage is to use big techniques involving all of your body and not relying on small techniques or trying to strike more times than your opponent has.

If you form bad habits on the way you attack and defend at this stage, it will take a long time to get rid of them in the future. It is important to reflect how you have been tackling ji-geiko by listening to your sempai and sensei's advice and by self-examination.

**3-2. 1st dan ~ 3rd dan.** The Kendo-ka at this level is required to further refine their shikake-waza and it is important to try a variety of shikake-waza on your own initiative. It is also important to attack not only going forward, but also to actively use hiki-waza (going backwards) and you should always keep in mind that you should try to complete your attack. As mentioned earlier, beating or being beaten is not the priority in ji-geiko. You must not focus only on how many times you strike or are struck by your opponent, but reflect on the process of how & why in each case [strike or struck]; utte-hansei, utarete-kansya (to reflect on one's attack after successfully scoring and thank your opponent after getting scored against) is an attitude that is expected of kendoka.

Kendoka at this level should also start considering three ways to overwhelm the opponent (san-sappo) in ji-geiko. One is to kill the opponents ki (spirit). This is to overwhelm the opponents ki by showing the fullness of your ki. Another is to kill the opponents ken (sword). This is to control the movement of the

tip of the opponents sword by restraining or deflecting the sword. One more is to kill the opponents waza. This is to anticipate the opponents attack by giving the opponent no chance to attack (All Japan Kendo Federation, 2000, pp. 79-80). At this level, it is still OK to make more use of ken and waza than ki in order to overwhelm and anticipate the opponent's attack. Kendoka at this level still has more waza to acquire. (It is too early at this level to start doing kendo that places the most emphasis on overwhelming your opponent by force of personality or by presence, as 6th dan and 7th dan kendoka can do.) They are still encouraged to try to use a variety of waza in ji-geiko by using shinai, footwork and the body actively and they are encouraged to use oji-waza in a ratio of 2/8 with shikake-waza in ji-geiko. What is important here is to understand the fundamental idea of oji-waza. You must not wait for the opponent to attack you and respond to it. You must lure the opponent into a position where you wish them to attack. You will be too late to execute successful oji-waza if you just wait for the opponent to attack. You should try to show your attacking spirit to the opponent without stopping your footwork and shinai movement and lure them into a position where you welcome them to attack. There are some people who think that the reason they cannot do oji-waza is due to their techniques (movement and form). What should be considered, however, is whether you are trying to lure the opponent into attacking you. At this level, it is not necessary to be able to execute oji-waza without thinking, although you are encouraged to practise it in ji-geiko, by keeping the fundamental idea for successful oji-waza in your mind.

**3-3. 4th dan ~ 5th dan.** Kendoka who reach this level are called senior or senpai. Kendoka at this level are expected to have developed their ability to read the 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 various situations, without thinking. 4th dan and 5th dan is the stage at which to start practising to acquire kendo that dominates the opponents chushin (centre) by small shinai and body movement, by controlling the opponent and by taking use of the opponent's intentions and movements. Kendoka at this level should place more emphasis on attacking after dominating the chushin and on rational and economical shinai control and footwork. This does not mean, however, excessively and immediately restraining shinai control and footwork. You should gradually change your kendo from kendo that relies mainly on physical ability to kendo that controls the opponent by small movements and the interior action of ki. At this level, it is recommended that the ratio of the use of shikake-waza to oji-waza should be 60% and 40%.

It is important to maintain good balance so that you can move in any direction smoothly and keep your hikagami (back of the left knee) tensed (not too much, just enough), so that you can kick the floor anytime without doing tsugi-ashi (to pull left foot in close to the right foot before attacking). If you keep these points in mind during ji-geiko but you feel or actually get cramp in your left leg, then it means that you have not previously been using your left leg correctly and that you have just started using it correctly now. What you must avoid, is feeling embarrassed at being struck by your opponent, 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 in ji-geiko. It is important not to hesitate to use big waza and to use them as soon as you see an opportunity. There are some 4th dan and 5th dan who adhere only to men and do not use other waza. It is, however, still important to try to use all the waza you have, in ji-geiko. Especially in tsubazeriai, as there are some who do not pay attention in tsubazeriai and lose their concentration, and it is important to keep good concentration and prepare yourself to attack whenever you see the opportunity.

**3-4. 6th dan.** It is not possible for me to describe how ji-geiko 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 ji-geiko at this level should be.

Kendoka who reach this level are called sensei. Sumi (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 ji-geiko, it is needless to say that kendoka at this level are required to show further rational and economical shinai and body movement. Kendoka who have reached 6th dan and above are usually at least middle aged or older. This means that their physical abilities are now lower than in their younger days and they cannot use the shinai and move the body as quickly as before. It is important to try to compensate for the decline of your physical abilities by further improvement of your ki and waza. Sumi (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 (de-bana). He also encourages them to practise not only straight attacking waza, but also suriage-waza, using tai-sabaki moving sideways or diagonally. At this level, it is more important to read the opponents intention and movement and to practise reacting properly in comparison with before. To acquire debana-waza, Sumi (2000) explains that it is important in ji-geiko to work it out for yourself, i.e. what situation and how you should move to break the opponents 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 to always reflect after each ji-geiko on how you performed with the opponent in the process of attacking, defending and counterattacking.

For kendo-ka at this level, Sumi (2000) also suggests one of the methods for a ji-geiko. 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 ji-geiko (however it should not be just men!). This 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 (2000, p. 202) also explains that there are a lot of things for kendoka at this level to consider, such as how to take your kamae, how to keep your balance, where and how much to tense and 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. This proves the importance of the connection between kihon-geiko, kata-geiko and ji-geiko. Kendo requires shugyo 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 ji-geiko 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 ji-geiko, and how ji-geiko should be approached at each level has been discussed. In the next part, therefore, what attitudes should be taken in ji-geiko and how to tackle ji-geiko with various types of opponents will be covered and giving examples on how to tackle ji-geiko with lower grades, higher grades, the same grades, someone much older, women and so on will be discussed.

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## - PART 2 -

### Introduction

In the previous part I discussed the relationship between ji-geiko, kihon-geiko and kata-geiko and examined how ji-geiko should be approached. I only mentioned in general how ji-geiko should be done at each level: elementary, intermediate and advanced. In this part, I would like to discuss how one should approach ji-geiko when confronted by different types of kendo-ka, focusing on the following: ji-geiko with someone senior, junior, of the same level, older, or of the opposite sex.

### 1. Ji-geiko with Seniors

What should be mentioned, firstly, is to try to get shodachi (the first cut) no matter who you are having the ji-geiko with. Irrespective of the difference in grade and experience.

Ji-geiko should start with ippon shobu played in earnest 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 shodachi by utilising all of your abilities to the full.

After attacking and defending shodachi, in this ji-geiko 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 grade such as ikkyu and shodan, it is important to attempt to break the seniors chushin [centre] by making the best use of your footwork, shinai and body movement. It is also important not to be afraid of being avoided and counter attacked, 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 such as: by being avoided or being struck debana-waza and oji-waza repeatedly. However, it is not profitable for you to be struck as a result of waiting for the senior to attack. Try to use all the waza you have and give 100 percent effort. Sumi (2000) points out that juniors should focus only on shikake-waza and try to do ji-geiko that makes them use up all of their energy in 5 minutes when they have ji-geiko with a senior.

If you are 2nd dan, 3rd dan or 4th dan, you should focus more on developing a way of dominating the chushin by using less footwork and shinai movement against seniors. It is important to attempt to dominate the chushin, 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 seniors counter attack.

Summarising this section: whatever your grade is, it is important to focus on your shikake-waza when you do ji-geiko with a senior. After doing ji-geiko with them, always reflect on how your seme worked against them and what you need to do when practising shikake-waza in the next ji-geiko.

## 2. Ji-geiko with Juniors

There is no need to stress the importance of shodachi here any more. What you should consider when doing ji-geiko with a junior, is not to lapse into a ji-geiko where the only intention is to obtain satisfaction by merely beating them. People tend to feel that they want to impress other people who are watching their ji-geiko. Such vanity should be severely admonished. From the viewpoint of showing responsibility as a senior, you have a responsibility to develop the juniors skills by making them realise their weak points, by striking them in that weak moment, but also by letting their strong points come through and striking you during the ji-geiko. 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 own satisfaction or if the opportunity to strike is too obvious. To enable the junior to improve, a senior is expected to perform as though their skill level was 0.5 dan higher than the junior and to concentrate 100 percent when facing them. The senior should counterattack when the junior makes 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. The senior should encourage the junior to grasp and understand the correct opportunity to strike though this hikitate-geiko. Seniors are also expected to encourage juniors to understand the importance of maintaining concentration by attacking if the junior is careless after their attack.

There is a saying that explains how a senior should approach ji-geiko with a junior: ware igai mina shi nari (everyone is ones teacher). That is, there is always something to learn through ji-geiko no matter who one does it with. One quite often hears, I am the highest grade 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 ji-geiko with. It is often taken for granted that seniors can strike juniors easily in ji-geiko, so for your further improvement, you should not just focus on striking but tackle ji-geiko with a clear task(s) or by giving yourself a handicap in this ji-geiko with juniors. However, you must not stick to a form of ji-geiko 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 such as: 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 fence in chika-ma during ji-geiko with someone smaller than yourself and to 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 ji-geiko where the aim is to obtain satisfaction, just by striking more times than their opponent has.

### **3. Ji-geiko with Someone of the Same Level**

Ji-geiko with someone of the same level gives you a good opportunity to reflect upon your progress and the fruits of your efforts. This 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 of a similar age and to do ji-geiko with them. It's quite normal not to want to be struck by your rival, but it is quite important to have an attitude whereby you try to show your best kendo no matter what happens. After they are struck, people also tend to try to return the attack before making enough seme. It is important to control this feeling and try to start again with the taking and re-taking of the chushin. By doing ji-geiko with someone of the same level, you should compare how your seme and waza [which worked against juniors] work against someone of the same level and whether there is anything your rival has and you do not have and vice versa. It is expected that all people of the same level will try to train harder in order to improve in a spirit of cooperation and friendly in the way of shugyo in kendo.

### **4. Ji-geiko with the Elderly**

Here, difference in age is considered rather than the difference in grade. This section is about attitudes to ji-geiko with someone elderly. It is strictly prohibited to do powerful tai-atari and tsuki to an elderly person in ji-geiko. However there may be some elderly people 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 contact using seme and waza that rely too much on strength should be restrained. This does not mean cutting corners in the ji-geiko. It is still important to try to complete your strike and to strike again in response to your opponent 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 ji-geiko with an elderly person despite the age difference

Elderly kendoka who have great experience 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 (their opponents intention, movement, waza and so on) Elderly kendoka are models of lifelong participation in kendo. By observing in particular elderly high grade kendoka doing ji-geiko and by having ji-geiko with them, we will receive many suggestions on how we should tackle kendo, just like them, we will be able to enjoy it throughout our lives.

### **5. Men Doing Ji-geiko with Women**

In the case of men doing ji-geiko with women, tai-atari and the use of waza that rely too much on physical power should also be restrained. Men should not fall into the habit of being afraid of being struck by a

women or getting frustrated when you cannot strike as you wish. This causes you to strike, ignoring opportunities, differences in physique and physical strength. This is the worst type of kendo, because it shows no respect for your opponent and creates nothing between you, even if you are able to strike your opponent by doing such kendo in the ji-geiko. Your opponent is not an enemy to destroy, rather that you are partners, who should help each other to improve by working hard together in shugyo. It can quite often be the case that you are much taller when doing ji-geiko with women and juniors. This is a good opportunity to do ji-geiko in chikama [if there is a difference of height between two kendoka, the one who is taller normally feels cramped and uncomfortable playing in this close distance]. Men should realise that having ji-geiko with women is a good opportunity to learn how to play (without relying too much on physical strength) by fencing in chikama. Moreover, through ji-geiko with women, men can also practise how to acquire the timing of debana-waza that catches the moment when your opponent comes to move into chikama.

## **6. Women Doing Ji-geiko with Men**

It is often thought that most women find it difficult to do ji-geiko as they would like to with men who are bulkier and taller. Just the thought of powerful attacks from well-built men may be scary. However, everyone has a weak point, for instance: maybe a distance which they find uncomfortable fighting in or a type of opponent which they find awkward to fight. This applies not only to women but to all kendoka. To keep avoiding practising with people who are hard for you to deal with in ji-geiko is not a solution. It will remain your problem. If they are hard to deal with in ji-geiko, it is suggested that you should try to do ji-geiko 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 who you need to do ji-geiko more with, in order to overcome your fear and problem. Generally tall people are not good at playing in chikama 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 chikama, as that is an advantageous distance for you. If you try to reach chikama by merely stepping forward, your opponent will try to do a debana attack. It is important therefore to devise various ways of reaching chikama 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 tai-atari. It is important therefore, to acquire 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 there are some men who behave in ji-geiko as if they are trying to hurt women. As well as this bad attitude in the ji-geiko, there is nothing to be learnt from such people. It is strongly recommended that you stop ji-geiko

immediately if you discover your opponent is one of these types, or that you refuse to do ji-geiko with them if you are asked.

## **7. Last words**

What should be expected of all kendoka when doing ji-geiko, is that you make your opponents feel that they want to have ji-geiko with you again. It will give me great pleasure if this article, which re-examined the relationship between kihon-geiko, kata-geiko and ji-geiko and how ji-geiko should be approached, gave you something useful in your kendo shugyo now and in the future.

### *References*

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