

EDITORS NOTE:

This is the first in a three part series that translates a 1909 edition of the KENDO KYOHAN (kendo teaching methodology). These small, pocket-sized books were issued to soldiers that fought in the Imperial Japanese forces. The manuals were modified and reprinted many times over the years and different versions can be found with relative ease (even online). However none has, to our knowledge, ever been available in English.

I will split and publish this in three different sections:

Part 1: General rules, Basic exercise regulations, tournament regulations, and guntojutsu (Military swordsmanship);

Part 2: Jukenjutsu (bayonet methods);

Part 3: Joba-guntojutsu (mounted military swordsmanship).

Notes will be marked with a bracketed number after the relevant section and can be found at the bottom of the article.

This series is the result of 6 months of (very!) hard translation work by [Isaac Meyer](#). I thank him for not only allowing it to be shared in public in this manner, but also for approaching kenshi247.net for this purpose. It really is an important edition to the English speaking kendo/budo community.

Please note that the image in the title is from a different Kendo Kyohan version (one published in 1934).

Kendo Kyohan

Published in the 41st Year of Meiji (1909)

Approved by Minister of War Terauchi Masatake

COMPLETE REGULATIONS AND GENERAL RULES

First Part

The purpose of kenjutsu is to familiarize oneself with the ways of close combat, the physical strength of the sword as well as mental strength(1) in order to vigorously exhibit the spirit of offense.

Second Part

Kenjutsu is divided in to saber and bayonet.(2)

Third Part

In the practice of kenjutsu follow the directions presented below, unless provided with other rules.

- 1) Saber: Reserved for officers, non-commissioned officers as well as the rank-and-file.
- 2) Bayonet: Studied by Infantrymen, Fortress gunners and engineers, officers and junior officers and all soldiers.

Fourth Part

Improvement in kenjutsu depends foremost on the skill of the instructor(3); thus at each level the instructor(4) too must practice with great fervor in order to improve their own skill.

Fifth Part

Kenjutsu should be taught individually. You(5) should be very familiar with the quality of each individual student as well as their physical attributes. Be careful to insure that student is capable of accurate and quick movement and has a full spirit.(6)

If a student is taught incorrect posture at the beginning, bad habits will become ingrained in their style.

Sixth Part

Motivation of students is extremely important in the improvement of their kenjutsu. Therefore, each teacher should attempt to patiently affect this attitude in their students.

Seventh Part

The practice of kenjutsu should always be viewed with the same seriousness as actual combat, with emphasis put on unflinching bravery and courage. At the same time, students should observe and reflect on prior exemplars of kenjutsu.(7)

Eighth Part

In the maneuvers of kenjutsu, make use either the shinai or mokujiū and wear protective bōgu.(8)

Ninth Part

Novices should make use of the gunyōjū(9) for practice. They should make use of imaginary opponents for practice. Against these imaginary opponents practice both thrusts and defensive counterattacks. By this practice students will come to understand the use of the gunyōjū.

Tenth Part

A serious practice of the basic movements is performed as follows: start a long distance from a set point, and then move towards that point performing various strikes. Be sure to practice diligently in order to make best use of this exercise. Utilize imaginary opponents to further increase its efficacy.

Eleventh Part

It is useful to have your students practice in difficult situations: at night, on uneven surfaces,

practicing against other soldiers or in a variety of other severe circumstances. However, practicing at night can be extremely dangerous, so take care when performing such practices.

Twelfth Part

Just prior to a match one should don the training equipment, taking care to check the fittings.

Thirteenth Part

Before and after either practicing the basics or sparring with an opponent, it is important for both participants to bow to each other with a feeling of gravity.

A bow in kenjutsu occurs as follows: the two competitors, after ensuring that their posture is correct, lean the top halves of their bodies forward while taking care to maintain eye contact with the opponent.(10)

BASIC EXERCISE REGULATIONS

Fourteenth Part

Basic exercises form the foundation of kenjutsu, and as such should be taught with attention to accuracy.

Fifteenth Part

When teaching basic exercises for the first time, teach in a gentle and quiet manner that emphasizes correct understanding of the point of the exercise. Once the student has grasped the meaning of the exercise, gradually increase the speed with which the exercise is performed.

Sixteenth Part

The basic exercises of kenjutsu (cutting, stabbing, defensive techniques, counter-thrusts, counter-cuts, etc) should be practiced several in a row.(11) The teacher should adjust the exercise to fit the context of the student, by either the student along a linear path or allowing him(12) freedom to maneuver. In either case the teacher should hide his intentions and retreat from the student by an appropriate amount after each attack.(13)

Seventeenth Part

Even after a student has learned the basic drills it is often still the case that during practice the teacher will notice bad habits that the student has learned and be forced to correct them. Therefore before and after every practice it is important to review the basics to avoid the ingraining of incorrect form.

Eighteenth Part

When you begin a drill, assume the correct stance(14) and start at a distance of four to five steps. This also applies during tournament matches.

Nineteenth Part

Return to the position of crossing the shinai or mokujiū after each time performing a basic drill.(15)

Twentieth Part

Orders given by an instructor are to be followed without fail. It is important to always display clear vigor during practice in following those commands.(16) Even so, when practicing a technique several times in a row, the student should gradually shift their focus from repeating the technique in a regular fashion to internalizing it.(17)

TOURNAMENT(18) REGULATIONS

Twenty-first Part

Tournaments are the primary means of achieving the goals of kenjutsu, particularly when it comes to measuring the level to which students have been passionately studying the art.

Twenty-second Part

A tournament match can be separated into one of two types: matches where competitors are at an equal level, and matches where one competitor has more practice than the other. An uneven match(19) is best performed after practicing basic techniques so as to allow focus on good basics. An even match should occur once the student has had a chance to practice and to make use of his talents.

Twenty-third Part

The point of the uneven, or teaching match is to instruct the student. The student must learn to judge the techniques of his opponent and counter his maneuvers through appropriate use of basic techniques. The student must be coached with particular emphasis towards the development of an aggressive style so as to move decisively and catch the opponent unawares.(20)

Twenty-fourth Part

During a teaching match the teacher should attack various weaknesses in the guard of the student (or the student should give the openings to the teacher), and the student should defend himself and perform a counter-attack. In this way, the student will learn the correct application of technique and at the same time develop a spirit of strong offense.

Twenty-fifth Part

Even after a student has progressed to the point of participating in even matches they should still engage in teaching matches as a way to measure their progress in sparring ability.

Twenty-sixth part

An even match is a form of mutual practice for both students where they may test the various offensive and defensive techniques they have learned. Victory or defeat should be decided by the correct and spirited use of techniques as well as the confidence and spiritual poise of the participants.

Twenty-seventh part

In order to have a successful even match the teacher must whenever possible explain to both participants key points about their technique, covering things like missed opportunities, mistakes, bad habits in their form, etc.

Twenty-eighth Part

A key concept of kenjutsu is “the one who acts first wins.” Therefore, it is vital to not lose the chance to infer the intention of the opponent’s movements.(21)

Twenty-ninth Part

When attacking, act with resolute bravery, as though you were prepared to die. If you perform attacks in this manner they will be successful. Furthermore, even after a successful attack you should maintain the mental poise to attack again. Do not give up the mentality of attacking. If you maintain this spirit, you can respond to changes in your opponent’s style.

Thirtieth Part

Generally when defending from an oncoming blow it is important to immediately counterattack. It is better to throw oneself into an attack(22) than to allow the opponent any leeway. By following this injunction you can create hesitation in your opponent and turn his attack back against him, allowing you to take the offensive.

Thirty-first Part

During an even match the teacher is responsible for deciding the victor. Proper judging has a strong effect on the efficacy of the student's kenjutsu. Therefore, the teacher is enjoined to pay scrupulous attention to matches in order to ensure the student is able to attain proficiency and understanding of the goals of kenjutsu.

Thirty-second Part

The natural shout(23) that arises with the energetic spirit of performing an attack is quite valuable. However, shouting for no reason(24) should be avoided.

Thirty-third Part

A student who drops his mokuji or shinai is open to attack by his opponent. However, the opponent is limited to one attack only before a halt is called to the match.

Thirty-fourth Part

When a match is decided the contestants should return to the fixed positions they took at the beginning of the match and either sheath their shinai(25) or stand at attention with their mokuji.

Thirty fifth Part

No strikes outside the permitted group are to be allowed during a match. When an attack lands outside the allowed targets the attacker may apologize with a call of "yogiri."(26)

Thirty-sixth Part

A teacher begins the tournament with the call of "hajime."(27) The match may be temporarily suspended by the teacher with the call of "matte."(28) Either the teacher or student may, in the case of an incident during the match that they feel requires a halt to be called, may request such a halt by calling "shibaraku."(29)

FIRST DIAGRAM



Striking points for thrusting and cutting

- *Men* (Head)
- *Nodo* (Throat)
- *Migi-dō* (Right torso)
- *Hidari-dō* (Left torso)
- *Zen-hiji* (Wrist)

Note: It is forbidden to deviate either a small or great amount from the hits shown above. However, in the case of the *men* point it is acceptable to strike outside the zone of the forehead.

Basic Movements

Slashing and Thrusting Attacks

Thirty-seventh Part

Acceptable areas for slashing attacks are listed below. (See first diagram)

Men(31)

Sayū-dō(32)

The area from the elbows down to the wrist.(33)

These are the strikes performed in basic practice.

Thirty-eighth Part

Acceptable areas for thrusting attacks are listed below. (See first diagram)

The throat.(34)

Sheathing the Shinai

SECOND PART DIAGRAM

圖二第
刀提



The sheathed position

Thirty-ninth Part

Take an unmoving posture and hold the shinai in the left hand just below the base of the hilt guard. Turn the cutting edge of the shinai so it faces down, and angle the tip of the shinai down and on a diagonal. (See Diagram 2)

Fortieth Part

The process of moving from sheathed position into the basic stance. (See Diagram 3)

The associated command is: kamae-tō.(35)

Keep your head facing forward, and point your right foot forward as well. Turn your torso to the left and grip the handle of the shinai in your right hand as if your hand has frozen to it.(36)

Set your right foot forward roughly half a step. Distribute your body weight evenly between your feet, and bend both your knees slightly. At the same time, separate your left hand a distance from your body, and hold the sword forward with your right hand allowing your elbow to bend slightly. Keep your fist roughly in line with your fist(37) and, keeping the blade of the sword facing down, point the tip of the sword roughly at the eyes of your opponent. Keep your upper body straight, and keep your torso directly underneath your hips. At all times, keep focus on your opponent's eyes.(38)

THIRD PART DIAGRAM

圖三第
備 構



Basic Stance

Forty-first Part

Relaxing into a sheathed position from a stance (Command: sagetō (39))

Turn your body forward, bring your left heel into line with your right heel, and sheath your sword.

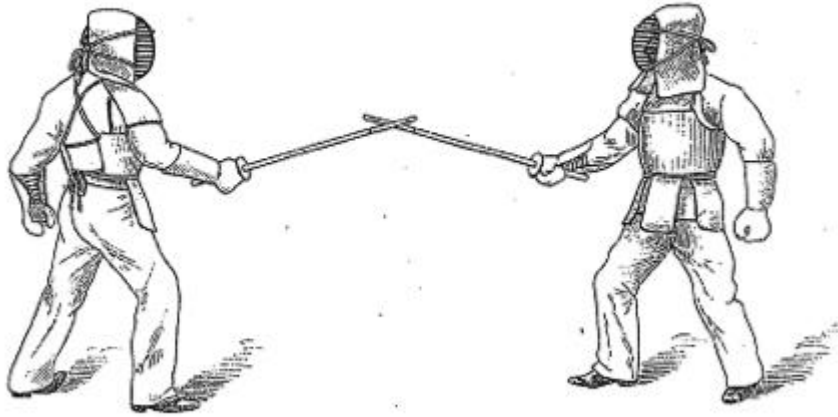
Forty-second Part: Advancing and Retreating

Advance or retreat is dependent upon how you want to expand or contract the distance between yourself and the opponent. In either case maintain your stance and move using both your legs while keeping them fairly rigid. Keep your feet close together and move quickly, keeping your steps light.

When advancing move your right foot directly in the appropriate direction and keep your left foot a fixed distance to the rear. When retreating, use the opposite approach. Depending on the situation, there may be cases in which your left foot will pass your right; in this case keep your right foot to the rear by a fixed distance. As before, when retreating reverse this pattern.

FOURTH PART DIAGRAM

圖 四 第
又交ノ刀



Crossing Swords During a Match

Forty-third Part: Crossing the swords

The point at which swords cross is the distance of roughly one handgrip from the tip. Usually, the enemy's sword presses against the left side of yours.(40) (See Diagram Four)

Striking and Thrusting

Forty-fourth Part

When striking, from the basic guard raise your sword overhead, quickly advance forward one step, and at the same time fully extend your elbow and quickly strike downwards.

After striking, immediately return to guard (follow the same practice for thrusting.)

Forty-fifth Part

When thrusting, from the basic guard quickly advance forward one step, and at the same time fully extend your elbow and quickly push your sword forward at the opponent.

FIFTH PART DIAGRAM

圖 五 第
擊 斬 ノ 面



Strikes to the *Men*

Forty-sixth Part: Strikes to the Men(See Diagram Five)

Command: Men wo utte(41)

To attack the head, keep your sword in front and swing up above your head, cutting down on to the enemy's face.

SIXTH PART DIAGRAM

二 共 圖 六 第 一 共
突 刺



Thrusts

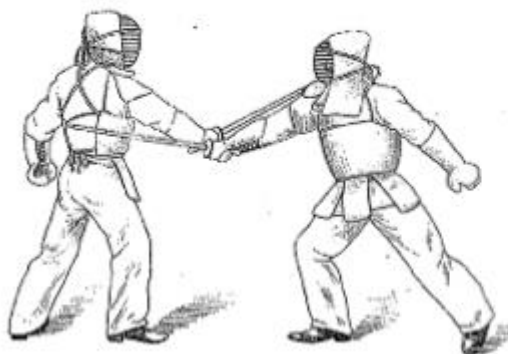
Forty-seventh Part: Thrusting (See Diagram Six)

Command: Tsuke.(42)

From the left or right side of the enemy's sword, thrust towards the enemy's throat.

SEVENTH PART DIAGRAM

圖 七 第
擊斬 / 朋右



A Slashing Attack to the *Migī-dō*

EIGHTH PART DIAGRAM

圖 八 第
擊斬 / 朋左



A Slashing Attack to the *Hidari-dō*

Forty-eighth Part: Cuts to Sayū Dō (See Diagrams Seven and Eight)

Command: Sayū-dō wo utte(43)

Bring your sword forward to the left or right, raise it over your head, turn the blade to the right or left and strike the left or right torso of your opponent.

Defensive Techniques and Counter Attacks

NINTH PART DIAGRAM

圖 九 第
拂防 / 面



Defending Against an Attack to the *Men*

Forty-ninth Part

To defend against a strike, from the basic stance quickly block the opponent's blade using the blade of your own sword.

Fiftieth Part

To perform a counter-cut, sweep the enemy's attack aside as described above and, taking advantage of the weakness of their guard thus created, use the power from your block to launch in to a strike.

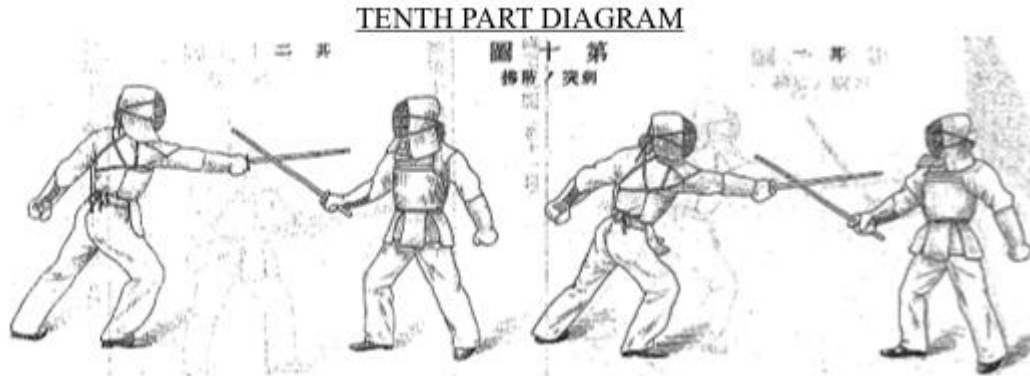
Fifty-first Part

Defensive sweeps and counterattacks for the Men

Commands:

First: Men wo fusege(44), Second: Men wo utte

To defend against a cut to the head, bring your first up and to the right, about on line with the top of your head, and keeping the sword roughly level block the attack. The counter-cut should be to the men target.



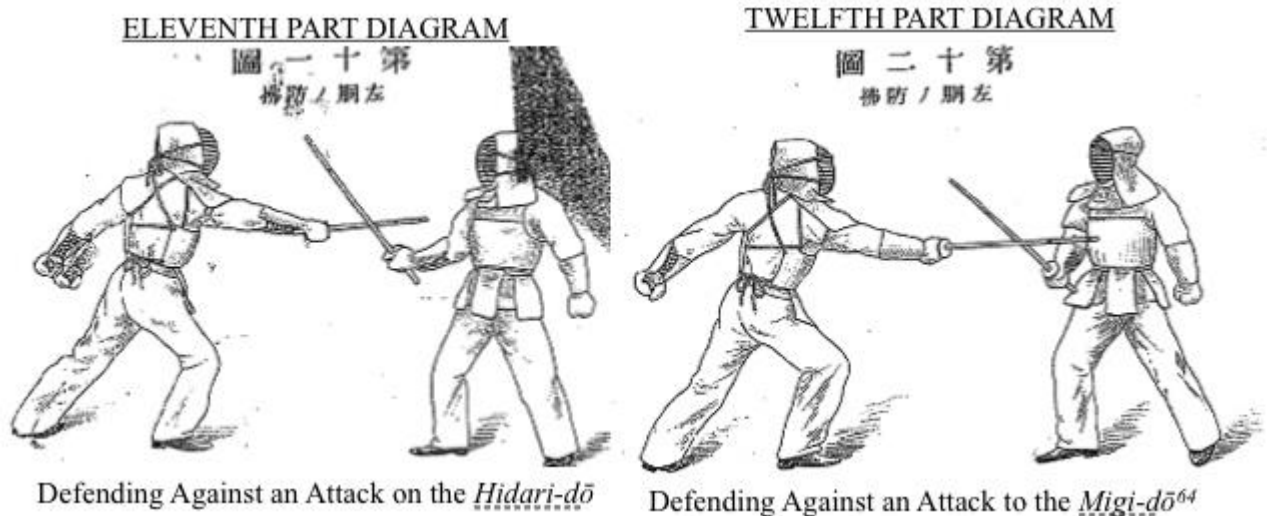
Fifty-second Part

Defending against a thrust and counter-attacking (See Diagram 10)

Commands:

First: Tsuki wo fusege(45), Second: Men wo utte

Block the thrust using the left or right side of the sword. The counter-attack should be to the men target.



Fifty-third Part

Defending the left and right torso and counter-attacking (See Diagrams 11, 12)

Commands:

First: Migi/Hidari-dō wo fusege(46), Second: Men wo utte

Bring down your left or right fist and, at the appropriate moment, bring the tip of your sword up diagonally to sweep aside the attack. The counter-attack should be to the men target.

Fifty-fourth Part

Always follow the established match regulations for any match.

Fifty-fifth Part

The usual method for using a sword is in the right hand. However, skilled students may, according to the situation use both hands or the left hand.

Notes

1. The characters used here, kiriyoku 気力, could also be rendered as “spiritual strength.” Specifically, the connotation is one of the mental strength necessary to win a fight, and thus the characters could also be rendered as “morale.” It is also a contrast with tairyoku 体力, or physical strength, indicating that strength beyond the purely physical is important in kenjutsu.
2. Jūkendō 銃剣道, or “gun kendō” is practiced to this day, though it lags far behind standard forms of kendō in popularity.
3. The term used for teacher is 教官(kyōkan).
4. The word here is literally “captain,” keeping with the military nature of the text.
5. No pronoun is used in the original Japanese text (a fairly common occurrence in Japanese). For ease of understanding, certain phrases have been adjusted to the English second person.
6. The terms used here, 氣勢(kisei) and 充実(jūjitsu), are terms used to indicate spiritual strength much like kiriyoku.
7. This idea is expressed in a single verb(kagamu) meaning, essentially, “to reflect on previous examples.” It has since fallen out of common use.
8. Bōgu is the term for protective gear worn by practitioners of kendō. The original design of bōgu dates back to the mid Edo Period.
9. The meaning of this term is unclear, but it appears to be a term for a practice saber, much like a shinai is a type of practice-oriented katana.
10. This emphasis on eye contact is a hold-over from more traditional swordsmanship. A swordsman who did not maintain eye contact with his opponent would leave himself open to a surprise attack.
11. Much like suburi, the rote drills that make up most of basic practice in kendō
12. The male pronoun kare is not used in the text. However, since women were prohibited from serving in the military, and since English does not allow for omission of the subject in the same way as Japanese, I have inserted the third person masculine pronoun in to certain sentences.
13. If the teacher does not retreat, the forward momentum of certain techniques will carry both partners in to close proximity, preventing the continuation of the exercise.
14. “Stance” in English martial arts parlance refers to a set position of the body so as to enable specific types of techniques. Depictions of various kenjutsu stances will be included later in the text.
15. A reference to ma’ ai, or distance. When two shinai are crossed both combatants are within striking distance of one another. This distance is the point from which all techniques begin.
16. The verb used in the original Japanese is not “display,” but rather “to vocalize” (hasshō suru 発唱する, a verb no longer used in modern Japanese). This is most likely a reference to strong kiai, a concept that is reviewed in the analysis of this text.
17. This injunction is strongly in line with the observations on Japanese military swordsmanship recorded by F.J. Norman. This focus on, to borrow his phrase, “loose play” will be discussed to greater effect in the analysis of this text.
18. “Tournament” here is a translation of 試合 (shiai), which also has the meaning of match. Thus, kendō no shiai could mean both a tournament composed of several matches as well as the individual matches themselves.
19. Literally kyōshū shiai (教習試合) or “match for teaching and learning”.
20. The literal translation of this phrase is “an aggressive posture that catches the opponent off guard through a spirit of decisive action.”
21. The English translation can seem rather unclear on this point. In essence, by inferring how the opponent will move a student can then attack in such a manner as to prevent the opponent from attacking. In modern kendō this technique remains very popular, and is known as debana-waza (出ばな技).
22. A more literal translation of the original Japanese is to “discard the self,” indicating a heedless attack designed to create fear in the opponent.
23. Shouting is a common accompaniment to an attack in kendō and most other budō. The compound usually used to express the concept is 気合 (lit. “expression of the spirit”) which is not used here.
24. With a connotation of “excessively.”
25. The shinai, being bamboo, has no sheath in the manner of a real sword. Instead, the shinai is held just above the hilt-guard with the pommel facing outwards and angled up.
26. From the verb yogiru (過る), meaning “to pass; to overshoot.”
27. From the verb hajimeru (始める), meaning “to start.”
28. From the verb matsu (待つ), meaning “to wait.”
29. Shibaraku (暫く) means roughly, “one moment; a short moment.”
30. Saber Combat.

31. The top of the head. A legal hit in modern kendō.
32. The left and right sides of the torso. A legal hit in modern kendō.
33. In modern kendō, this target zone has been halved in size, and is referred to as kote (小手). The term used in this text is mae-hiji (前臂).
34. Thrusting attacks to the throat remain a part of modern kendō, where they are referred to simply as tsuki (突き), meaning “a thrust.”
35. Literally, “prepare the sword.” The same command is used in modern kendō.
36. Dropping the shinai remains a foul in modern kendō and would be even more of a concern in a one-handed fighting style.
37. As opposed to angling the wrist up, which is essential to the basic stance of kendō.
38. This stance is radically different from the one used in kendō, and more strongly resembles a fencer’s sideways stance than anything traditional to Japanese swordsmanship.
39. Literally, “lower the sword.”
40. As in modern kendō and in Western fencing.
41. “Strike the head.”
42. The imperative form of tsuku, meaning “to thrust.”
43. “Strike the left and right torso.”
44. “Protect the head.”
45. “Protect against the thrust.”
46. “Protect the left or right torso.”

Sources

近代デジタルライブラリー

Please note that the original Japanese text and pictures are in the public domain.

About the author Isaac Meyer Isaac Meyer began studying kendo as a sophomore in high school. He currently holds a nidan, and has spent the previous three years as co-captain of the kendo team at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. He will receive a BA with Honors in History in May of 2010 after completing a senior thesis on the development of modern kendo in the Meiji and Taisho periods, and will be moving to Seattle in order to pursue an MA in Japan Studies from the University of Washington. [More posts by this author](#)