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Jiki Shinkage-ryū: Art in Four Seasons

Some notes on aspects of practice

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気剣体の一致を会得したとき
剣術の極意は全うするのである

"When one has mastered the harmony of spirit, sword, and body,
they will have achieved the ultimate goal of swordsmanship."

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I. Raito and Sente

Examining the relationship between posture and initiative in the tactical pattern practices of Jiki Shinkage-ryū.

Raito (the variation of *jodan no kamae* used in Jiki Shinkage-ryū) is often viewed as a strong offensive kamae, good to attack from. It is a variant of jodan where the arms are stretched overhead with the tip of the sword angled behind you, overhead. It seems like it would be a position from which you could launch a powerful attack, and in fact it is. However, in to-no-kata, we do not see shidachi using raito to directly attack, except in one introductory kata called menkage. We examine a bit of the structure of to-no-kata to explain why this might be, and the combative initiatives involved.

In to-no-kata, the first kata called *ryubi* (dragon's tail) involves stepping forward and backwards, executing continuous yokomen strikes to the side of the head (or forearm if the opponent is in an upper-level stance such as jodan or hasso). The next two kata, called *menkage* drill similar movements with a direct, downward, cut to the helmet (men). The third pairing, first part of a set called *teppa*, involves waiting in raito and cutting kesa down to the left or the right, with associated footwork against an upper level or mid-level attack.

Then in the second half of teppa, matsukaze, and hayafune (6 of the kata in the set as a whole) shidachi *advances* three steps in raito and then cuts down slowly to show they know what proper range is. Then various things happen. He provokes uchitachi into moving, but often uchi does not initially take the bait. This is unusual for a kenjutsu ryuha, as usually uchitachi attacks shidachi in some way, or leads him into a specific situation. In to-no-kata, shidachi is learning in these kata how to attack and a lot is hidden beneath the surface.

In Jiki Shinkage-ryū, we want to train ourselves to know what the optimal distance (ma-ai) is from which to attack and advance in a way that shuts down options for the opponent. Similarly, in Hōjō, uchidachi advances in raito three steps and presents a target, which shidachi attacks. For example, in the teppa kata where shidachi advances, uchidachi attacks first or has to respond: the kasumi cut shidachi performs is one way to break (thus the name teppa, which means breaking iron) the seigan (chudan) kamae uchidachi is in. Similarly, in the second kata in Hōjō, shidachi advances forward and follows with kasumi from seigan. We need to drill how to respond when uchidachi does blink or flinch and moves. If they do, cutting men or yokomen or kesa from raito, like we do in ryubi and menkage, is a skill that should eventually be reflexive, filling the gap.

If you think of to-no-kata as somewhat of a progression, then in ryubi and menkage there is movement on the part of both combatants. If the opponent moves back, to attempt to get out of range and disconnect or respond tactically at some kind of angle, we chase them down and cut them down. It looks on the surface as though uchi is doing *kage* (mirroring, reflecting, or shadowing) to shidachi's attack, but in fact uchi is retreating first, setting up the kata for shidachi. So in fact it is shidachi learning how to shadow (kage) uchidachi's retreat.

The next two kata explore what happens if you don't have initiative and someone comes in on you. In the first two kata in teppa, shidachi cuts with kesagiri to the right and then to the left. Then the format shifts where we have six kata where we are advancing. In the second two teppa kata, we deal with what happens if the person does not move from their stance (i.e., they are like iron) and we meet in awase (mutual seigan or what is sometimes called musugu in Shinkage-ryū). Distance is broken, we are in range, and a sudden thrust or kasumi is a reasonable action to take.

Another new reflex developed.

Often, when a person is in raito and the range is just a bit too close (i.e., they have made a mistake, or they are about to attack and haven't moved yet), if we are in hasso or sha no kurai (a lower level stance where the sword extends out behind you, between waist and knee level) we can take advantage and interrupt their attack. This is sometimes called *sen sen no sen* (pre-empting an attack which has been decided upon but not yet manifested). So, hasso and sha (on either side; on the left people call it sometimes waki-no-kamae or gyaku-sha) are very good postures to attack from, in this preemptive manner. In fact, uchidachi attacks quite a bit from a low stance in Jiki Shinkage-ryū. Although we get accustomed to the end of many of the to-no-kata to be kind of rote or ritual in nature, there are a lot of opportunities there for variations and they should be explored.

It is less tiring to be in hasso, your hands are not as vulnerable, and you can attack very quickly. So hasso is on the inside very aggressive (ken), but it is outwardly waiting/hidden (tai). In Hōjō we see attacks by shidachi from hasso and from sha. In to-no-kata we see initial cuts from raito and then later in matsukaze, from sha. Interestingly, shidachi does not adopt hasso at any point in to-no-kata.

This I think is a riddle.

To attack suddenly and with power from raito, a very important skill to cultivate to help with doing so are being able to relax in raito while stretching the arms and then cut with gravity,

adding to gravity instead of fighting it, so that you can generate power in an instant. The arms should be stretched in raito, with the shoulder blades pulled down, so that when you cut you feel as if you are releasing an arrow into flight. None of the joints should be locked — in Chinese martial arts we sometimes call this *song* or "relaxed", albeit that is a somewhat technical term with a specific meaning. In this context, we want to be relaxed as much as possible, so that when the opponent makes a mistake, there is little to no delay. Kage here is an active action versus simply passively miming a movement of another person — it is operating at a mental and spiritual level.

Generally, in Shinkage-ryū we want to provoke the opponent into making a mistake. Some lines of Shinkage-ryū kata do this by leaving an opening, to lure the opponent into attacking from a specific angle they are expecting. This can work quite well sometimes but also can devolve into being an overly passive approach. Adherents think if they are smart enough, and precise enough, they can win. But they can also get used to too specific attacks in kata practice, especially if they never stress test their training through sparring.

Jiki Shinkage-ryū, as I understand it does less of that, but instead tries to dominate the opponent, cutting down options for them. In the ideal case, you fix them in place, or drive them back, and then cut them down without them reacting. There is a famous story about a match like that with Sakakibara. But for normal people like us, it is more likely we might be able to cause a person to flinch or react and attack us when they are not quite ready or not stable — we are entering but haven't yet attacked, and we get them to overreact. Then their attack is sudden but not as strong as it should be, and potentially they haven't moved as much as they would like, so we can cut through their attack and fix them in place, often cutting downward through the centerline and catching the head or torso or forearms.

I think that is why in a lot of the to-no-kata, one person does not react. We are training ourselves not to get perturbed by what the other person is doing. This is called fudoshin. Then the attacks or reactions in the second six to-no-kata (the end of teppa, matsukaze, hayafune) are about how does one follow up and still attack when the initial entry does not shake the opponent out of their stance.

The different kata of Jiki Shinkage-ryū relate to each other in a recursive fashion. For example, the triangle step of Sangakuen is presented/encoded within Jiki Shinkage-ryū in the kata Ryubi (Tail of the Dragon) and Menkage, but one must explore kuzushi and variation to find it. Doing so then prepares the practitioner for more advanced kuzushi with kodachi but also develops in them a new understanding of the tactical practices encoded within *to-no-kata*.

We can find written in a densho handed from Kammiizumi to Yagyū Munetoshi:

> As for the two aspects [of combat] that are attack (ken 懸) and defense (tai 待), [one should] not [let the mind] linger on one aspect but [always] adjust oneself freely from moment to moment in accordance with the opponent's movements. This [free, moment-by-moment adjustment] is like [the natural and swift] manipulating of a sail in accordance with the change of the wind [at the precise moment when the change is felt] or the [immediate] releasing of the hawk as soon as the rabbit is detected. Usually, one defines attack to be attack and defense to be defense, but [in our lineage] attack is not attack and defense not defense; when attacking, the mind is in defense, and when defending, the mind is in attack. It is like the cat sleeping under the flowering peony tree. 32 (Densho handed down from Kamiizumi Hidetsuna 上泉秀綱 [c. 1508–1577], founder of Shinkage-ryū, to Yagyū Munetoshi 柳生宗厳 [1529–1606]
>
> — Trenson, S., 2022 quoting Omori, N. 1991.

The dualities of ken and tai referenced above relate to mind and movement, and attack and defense. They are a a very useful perspective by which one can analyze portions of Jiki Shinkage-ryū kata that remain close to other Shinkage-ryū. Let us now turn to a feature of Jiki Shinkage-ryū that is quite different to other surviving lines of practice.

Jiki Shinkage-ryū kata practice often adopts two parts to its "ya-ei" kiai. The ya kiai voiced just as we break ma-ai might cause a person to flinch and give up their stance or posture. I don't think most people's kiai is good enough to do that (mine isn't, and I have spent a lot of time trying to cultivate proper kiai) so I usually never in sparring do a two-part ya-ei kiai. But I think the ya-ei is a hint to what is going on in each kata – we provoke the other person and attack them just as they are thinking of attacking.

This also might be an example of *sen sen no sen*.

II. Enren: Circling Continuously

An example of the deconstruction of kata. Kuzushi is the name for the activity of pulling apart and analyzing kata in Shinkage-ryū, making connections between different parts of its curriculum. It also at times can refer to sudden, spontaneous, change.

While attending Kagami Biraki at Lonin in 2025, I filled in for one of my senior students, who was ill and unable to attend. I joined the enbu of kata, performing the To-no-kata and Kodachi sections of formal Jiki Shinkage-ryū curriculum. I tried to provide a strong amount of pressure (*seme*) and felt our offering of kata exhibited the resolve I am attempting to cultivate through Shinkage-ryū practice.

The second portion of Jiki Shinkage-ryū kata practice is called *to no kata* and consists of 14 short partner forms. I have been thinking of them as comprising several sections. The second part of the last kata in the set is called *enren* (圓連), which alludes to linking or connecting links of a chain or beads of a mala into a circle, has a flowing uchikomi practice that is said to originally have been the fifth kata in the introductory set called *hōjō*, which is based on Taoist five element theory. In the current arrangement of hōjō the fifth element of earth represents the end of each season (spring, summer, autumn, winter) that changes into the next. This is represented by a ritual movement called *gehan-in* that then flows into walking methods called *unpō* performed with the type of formal breathing associated to the next season. Originally, there were five kata, similar to the set *sangakuen* in Yagyu Shinkage-ryū, with harvest season as the fifth component, between summer and autumn.

In *enren*, the uchikomi is a randori-like practice of repeated cutting against a target. It is a nice form of moving suburi and demonstrates lateral movement otherwise missing in the rest of the curriculum. However, it is done cryptically, where one cuts on a line of attack not associated with any combative meaning. It seems, on the surface, to be pressure testing without a path that leads towards developing combative ability. It is true the movements are hard to execute as uchi and shi look to be doing the same thing but are not. They are performing different motions (one yin and one yang) that balance each other. In that way, the capstone kata is teaching that the concept of *kage* or shadowing, like yin relating to yang or solid to transparent, can be more complex than simply balancing posture or stance against a particular static *kamae* an adversary adopts.

Subtleties aside, what the uchikomi in practice often provides is a very difficult ending to the sequence of kata when performed continuously. Uchidachi has to extend their kiai to signal to

shidachi the repeated cutting is about to end, which breaks the meaning and purpose of having an uchidachi vs. shidachi role (which Jiki Shinkage-ryū is otherwise very good at maintaining compared to some other arts). Uchidachi should be pushing shidachi, not aiding them. But without that coordination, it is not possible to end the repeated sequence smoothly.

In our case, the ending of the sequence happened out of rhythm for some reason and *shidachi* realized they would be struck. They dodged, but from my perspective it was as if they had disappeared right before my attack was to land. This is a skill Shinkage-ryū is supposed to cultivate — done properly the practitioner disappears suddenly from view. The patron deity of Shinkage-ryū, Marishiten (Marici), is the Buddhist goddess of light and thought to grant the *siddhi* or *genjutsu* of invisibility. Suddenly disappearing for a moment, in coordinated *tai-sabaki* and sword movement, is an example of this kind of skill.

When this happened, I struck with full force and found only empty space instead of shidachi's *shinai* held out as a makiwara. Because we were moving fast and light for the repeated uchikomi, I was holding my training implement (the shinai is not actually a weapon) too lightly. Not finding a target and maintaining my posture, the shinai went flying from my hands. Good that I did not lose my balance — bad that my weapon went flying from my hands like an arrow shot into the ground.

In the moment, having lost my weapon but not my posture, I maintained zanshin and reverted to unpō — advancing slowly and strongly to drive shidachi back, albeit without a weapon. Had *shi* attacked while I was unarmed, I could have accepted the cut, to end the kata, or attempted to respond. As it was, he mirrored my movements. Really, anything could have happened.

Afterwards, I moved back two steps and knelt to retrieve my weapon and continued to move away, doing my best to mentally keep forward pressure the whole time. We wound up manifesting, spontaneously, a section of kata from the final section of Jiki Shinkage-ryū called *marobashi*, which my partner has never seen. Usually it is shidachi advancing, with kodachi against tachi, but the spirit was the same. In that moment, my tactical failure was an opportunity to keep *zanshin* despite the shock of having something go suddenly, unexpectedly, wrong.

Developing *shidachi* to the point they can win is the purpose of *to no kata*.

III. From Kodachi to Kogusoku

Using kodachi practice as an example, we discuss how different kata sets in Jiki Shinkage-ryū relate to and inform one another and describe some applications and variations on standard practice. Kodachi can be an entry point to close-range armed grappling, which we call kogusoku.

According to the Koyo Gunkan Massho Ketsuyobon, related in Chapter 5 of Takeda-ryū Gungaku Zensho Kanokai (1935), the founder of Jiki Shinkage-ryū, Matsumoto Bizen no Kami, fought in combat with the spear 23 times in the battles of Kashima and Katori and claimed the heads of 25 officers and 76 ordinary soldiers. Yamada Ippusai, the 4th generated head of Jiki, is supposed to have arranged To-no-kata, and likely added the unpo, a-un kokyu, and long kiai we see in Hōjō. Jiki Shinkage-ryū before Yamada Ippusai was likely closer to other forms of Shinkage-ryū. One area of study maintained in some lines of Shinkage-ryū is close-quarter armed combat called *kogusoku*.

In this essay, we examine formal Jiki Shinkage-ryū *kodachi* practice and one (somewhat idiosyncratic) perspective on how breaking down the kata in a process of *kuzushi* can reveal much more than first is apparent. Kodachi is the first "upper level" kata set in Jiki Shinkage-ryū, and it starts to involve refined body mechanics that would be very difficult to just jump into without doing unpo, Hōjō, and To-no-kata first, or having some other training of some kind to rely on. Even though there are only six kata, they take some time to develop skill at. In addition, they are more heavily modified from their true intention/application, potentially in order to conceal what is going on from outsiders. Hōjō and To-no-kata have many layers of meaning as well, but in Kodachi we can't just jump in and do that without having solid Jiki Shinkage-ryū body mechanics established. It dependends on the person *already* being a Jiki Shinkage-ryū practitioner, as opposed to teaching someone how to become a Jiki Shinkage-ryū practitioner.

Posture and stepping methods taught in Hōjō help us avoid attacks and also generate power. Hips are straight in pure Jiki, and this is something that takes time to cultivate if a person has practiced other martial arts. Other Shinkage-ryū will pull across the lower back (koshi) to generate power. Jiki Shinkage-ryū in the line I was taught keeps the hips straight. When entering in kodachi, it is especially important on the initial contact to keep the hips square and not tilt the upper body or lean to either side. Doing so will weaken the entry and leave the swordsman vulnerable to the power of the tachi.

One example of how earlier sets prepare for later practice is the early introduction of *tai atari*. Tai Atari performed in Hasso Happa at first seems like a ritualistic movement, but it sets in place a mindset important for later sets such as kodachi, where one has to attack in a fully commited manner, not being concerned with success or failure. One throws one's life away to get close enough to the tachi to survive.

Tai atari, in kuzushi (application/analysis) can be continuous and upward angled to continue to advance after a downward cut drives the opponent back. One can add a sideways deflection if needed but should not wait or try to time a perfect engagement. This is a half sword position called Torii-dome (gate block), which can be useful in an emergency. However, many things are not final – uchitachi can press upward against that movement to deflect. Shidachi can flow over the top in a forward version of the half sword position with the left hand on the forehead (normally in kata shown retreating vs a lateral pressing cut).

So, sometimes movements that are taught advancing in pattern practice, if reversed, exhibit deeper levels of practice. There are many riddles such as these. For example, the upper level (jodan) Tai Atari from the last kata in Hōjō, called Chotan Ichimi, can be an upward deflection against a downward attack that then twists immediately to the side to stab the face or cut the side of neck, instead of a ritualistic stab from long range, as initially presented.

In the dōjō I trained at, we did long Ya Ei kiai extended for breath training during Hōjō. Other groups do shorter sharper kiai in Hōjō and To-no-kata. There are said to be three levels of practice of each kata set in Jiki Shinkage-ryū. One can imagine the first as being to draw out the spirit in the practitioner, with a focus on breathing and long powerful kiai. The second could be refining that power into a sharper, more precise, instrument. The third quiets the practice, and develops the ability to respond and move unencumbered, driven by intuition and wisdom.

The next Jiki Shinkage-ryū kata set after Kodachi is called Habiki. Habiki refers to the use of actual swords instead of shinai or bokken, albeit with a rebated edge. A challenge will be finding suitable implements. The practice is destructive – habiki-to (rebated edge swords) used for this practice will invariably get damaged over time. Historically, people would use older swords they didn't care about as much. These are now called "antiques" so one needs suitable alternatives. Generally, we want swords that are sturdy, so that they are safe to use and do not fall apart on us, but we run into the problem that higher-quality modern swords are also expensive, even if they are not antiques.

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There are complex body mechanics involved when executing the yielding (nagashi) movement in the outer (omote) way of practice in kodachi, where a person rises with ankles crossed on the outer edges of both feet. This trains the lower tendons in the ankles and shins but is likely not actually combative – you would not do that against an opponent as you wind up unstable – in fact, there very little power associated to the final cut in each kata when performed that way, unless you connect the two arms across the back. In that omote manner of performance, it is a slow ritualistic downward cut performed with the kiai of "mu".

Kodachi is in some ways closer to Hōjō than To-no-kata, in that a lot of its true intentions are obscured. Hōjō is "explained" quite a bit by a later set, Habiki, which some view as an older version of Hōjō, but I believe is also a bridge to applying what a person has learned in Hōjō to combat. If Hōjō is related to Sangakuen no Tachi in other lines of Shinkage-ryū, then Habiki is similar to or related to Empi no Tachi in other lines of Shinkage-ryū.

What is different about kodachi compared to Hōjō in Jiki Shinkage-ryū is that the upper-level set performed with kodachi, called Marobashi, is heavily ritualized and obscured and does not explain kodachi very much at all. Hōjō provides basic foundations of practice, To-no-kata develops basic tactics and the concept of centerline, Kodachi teaches infighting and also stability around the central axis. Habiki puts it all together and refines lower body connection and back bow in the practitioner, for stability, agility, and strength.

At my dōjō (the Gassankan) I practice applications in armed grappling, which Shinkage-ryū calls kogusoku (a term used by several arts). In the way I am organizing my teaching, kodachi is the last kata set of the first group of teachings we focus on, and kogusoku is the first private set. I will only discuss it at a high level here. The six kodachi kata are:

1. Fūsei
2. Suisei
3. Kissaki Gae(shi)
4. Tsuba Jiri
5. Toppi Oppi
6. Enkai

Fusei and Suisei are paired — winding up in a bind (tsuba zerai), right hand palm down. Fusei enters from above while suisei enters from below. Kissaki Gaeshi and Tsuba Jiri are also paired — also winding up in a bind, but right-hand palm up. Kissaki gaeshi enters from above and Tsuba Jiri enters from below. On the first 3 kata, we enter with the left foot forward. The fourth

kata begins with the right foot forward, but has two sections, so we end with the left foot forward ultimately.

Fusei & Suisei

On Fūsei and Suisei, there are several kuzushi or kogusoku applications, which depend on how uchidachi is affected by the initial entry. If you both meet and feel uchi is strong, then you yield as in the formal kata, ideally off balancing uchidachi. But, instead of lifting the left arm and doing the slow downward cut with "mu" kiai, control from the inside of his right arm with your left hand to further off balance him and then cut his neck immediately. If you meet and he remains connected at the tsuba (tsuba zerai), slip to the right, pulling him to the left with your left arm and cutting horizontally to the right. Since the kodachi is shorter, you can get past his blade. If you meet and he bounces off you, due to your momentum and posture, step forward and cut his face mask (ganmen) vertically, continuing to drive him back. There is also a more subtle or "ideal" application, which is not kogusoku per se, as it does not involve body to body contact. You perform slightly different footwork on the entry to bypass his cut and directly cut his neck. This is best done with armor, as it is very direct and dangerous. This is hard to do, as it requires you to still have the same full weight on the lead leg and feeling of stopping immediately, but from a different angle.

This must be explained in person and is not for the uninitiated.

Kissaki Gaeshi

On Kissaki Gaeshi, there is an alternate footwork that allows you to cut the neck directly, bypassing his sword. If you wind up in tsuba zerai, then there are kuzushi that more closely mirror the standard slow practice. Enter as usual and lift uchi's arm and roll it over, controlling their scapula, to double them over and cut downward at the back of their neck. This more aggressively doubles uchi over than in the standard kata. This is a one-handed arm bar type of motion, but you do it just long enough to cut or stab. I generally curve the arm here more than some of my compatriots, closer to how the Ku-un kai demonstrates the kata than how it is practiced in some other surviving lines of the art. You can also enter with the left foot after you have control of the upper arm, to throw uchidachi down and back, for a second variation. From the initial tsuba zerai position palm up, you can pull his arms to his right with your left arm, instead of trying to control his elbow, and cut directly outward across his neck. Then turn your palm to face down and pull his sword down, keeping his momentum going, and cut

directly outward across his neck. The left arm can come forward to engage and control his arm. This can be done in place or adding a cross step with the left foot to the outside of the right foot.

Tsuba Jiri

Some kogusoku applications on Tsuba Jiri, from the second part, where you are pushing downward on the tsuka (hilt) between uchidachi's grip and would formally do a long slow circle and stab with "mu" kiai, include: taking uchidachi down to the left, over your left leg; scooping the leg if uchidachi squats down; driving directly forward to take uchidachi down and back along his line of attack; and turning inward slightly and entering with the left leg and elbow to take uchidachi down sideways and back (to his left). These train different directions to take uchidachi down, and in each you follow and stab as he lands.

One also can attack the proximal side of the neck quickly, making sure to keep downward pressure on the tsuka as you do so. The sweeps and throws are useful if they begin to grapple with you, or draw another weapon (e.g., their own kodachi or tanto) once at close range. Other related arts that preserve a jujutsu curriculum (e.g., Kashima-shinryu) perform movements like this, albeit with tachi instead of kodachi.

On Tsuba Jiri, we also can also practice kuzushi from the initial palm up, right foot forward, entry. We want the direction of contact to begin to drive uchi backwards and onto his heels or arching his back a little bit if possible. If that begins to drive uchi back, we can lever the left grip forward a bit to begin to bend his right arm as we step our left foot forward. As we do so, we can fold the kodachi over the top to cut the right side of his neck. It is important to explore different directions as uchi is having his grip levered and the footwork and counterbalance he uses to neutralize temporarily what shidachi is doing.

Toppi Oppi

Toppi oppi is about developing leg strength and helps prepare for the next kata set, called habiki. Classically, it is performed into a half seiza position with one leg extended, from which shidachi springs up, lifting the pelvic floor and engaging the psoas as the bent leg drives upward. I favor a low crouching posture I favor when doing the kata, to be able to spring upwards quickly, which is adopted from Hebei Xingyi. This is one small difference in how I preserve Jiki Shinkage-ryū kodachi compared to other lines. On the first kneeling position (on the right knee) the kodachi is held one handed at your right side and the left hand at the left side of the body. When you rise up and deflect inwards and upwards, palm up, you kick with

the right leg. On the second kneeling position (on the left knee) the kodachi is on your center line, with the left hand on top of the mune (back of the blade).

Enkai

Enkai is the key that unlocks the previous five kata, introducing the concept that leads to advanced kuzushi for the initiated, which I allude to but do not describe above.

In Shinkage-ryū, there is a maxim: one mind, any weapon.

Tsuba zerai is introduced in kodachi against tachi kata but one can practice tsuba-zerai (meeting with the tsuba) also with tachi. So, for example, one can start ryubi and uchidachi can do a T step instead of stepping back and meet tsuba-zerai instead of with a cut. We also drill jun (right hand palm up) and gyaku (right hand palm down, hands crossed) entries to tsuba-zerai in free practice, using fukuro shinai. Shidachi can practice meeting their force and off-balancing them slightly and then cutting the side (tare). Uchidachi can practice half-sword techniques and T-step to respond at close range. Uchidachi can also half-sword on the initial T-step, as a separate approach to avoid tsuba-zerai. Usually, this cuts under the wrist. The variations continue, but all bring the exponent into close quarter contact with their enemy, and serve as a bridge to grappling

Some of kodachi informs formal to-no-kata practice. In Matsukaze, movements presented in the kodachi kissaki gaeshi allow us to move around the opponent's blade. This is an example of marobashi or "free or unimpeded movement".

The triangle step of Sangakuen is presented/encoded within Jiki Shinkage-ryū in the kata Ryubi (Tail of the Dragon) and Menkage, but one must explore kuzushi and variation in order to find it. Doing so then prepares the practitioner for more advanced kuzushi with kodachi. There are additional teachings we could discuss (e.g., habiki, marobashi — only alluded to above) but they are private to the tradition. These are but some of the concepts that make Jiki Shinkage-ryū a lifelong practice.

IV. Hōjō ken Kokoro-e sho

法定劍心得書

Following is a ritual text or creed concerned with Jiki Shinkage-ryū Hōjō swordsmanship, provided for reference based on Jiki Shinkage-ryū material. This text is typically chanted or recited before performance of the Hōjō kata of Jiki Shinkage-ryū:

- Phonetics are provided to aid in chanting at the beginning of practice, akin to Shintō norito (祝詞).
- English translations are based on Google Translate, as other English translations are private to specific groups and not reproduced here.
- Please consult Japanese language references for additional context and copies of historical documents.

Hōjō is a foundational practice and encodes Taoist five element theory as manifested by the pace, rhythm, breathing, and combative postures adopted during its four major sections representing Wood, Fire, Metal, and Water elements and its connecting sequences representing the element of Earth.

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Text on Understanding Foundational Swordsmanship

一、 法定ハ手舞足踏ノ術ニ非ズ上ハ則チ 神明ノ至徳ニシテ下 ハ平常心ノ要ナリ

Hō jō wa te no bu a shi bu mi no ju tsu ni a ra zu. Ka mi wa su na wa chi shin mei no shi to ku ni shi te, shi mo wa hei jō shin no yō na ri

Hōjō is not simply a set of combative movements. Universally, it is a manifestation of divine virtue. Personally, it is necessity of the impartial mind.

二、法ハ 大自然法則 ニシテ 定ハ其ノ道筋 ヲ定メタル モノナレバ 進退自ラ 天測アリ 直キ心ヲ以モッテ百錬得スベシ

Hō wa dai shi zen no hō so ku ni shi te, jō wa so no mi chi su ji wo sa da me ta ru mo no na re ba shin tai mi zu ka ra ten so ku a ri ji ki shin wo mo te hya ku ren ji to ku su be shi

Hō is natural law. Jō is its course. If you can predict the course of your actions, you can move forward and backward clearly. With a clear mind, you can achieve anything.

三、此道ヲ修ムル 者ハ勝負に拘り 暴慢ノ振舞有ルベカラズ或ハ 己ヲ卑下シテ他ニ阿ルベカラズ 其ノ行ハ 智ノ感ズル 所 ニ 應シ義ノ在ル所 ニ 從ウノミ

Ko no mi chi wo o sa mu ru mo no wa shō bu ni ka ka wa ri bō man no fu ru mai a ru be ka ra zu. A rui wa o no re wo hi ge shi te, ta ni o mo ne ru be ka ra zu. So no gyō wa chi no kan zu ru to ko ro ni ō shi, gi no aru to ko ro ni shi ta ga u no mi

Those who practice this path should not be obsessed with winning or behave arrogantly, nor should they belittle themselves or flatter others. Their actions should be in accordance with what wisdom inspires and what righteousness is.

四、此道ノ真ヲ 得レバ衆魔悉ク 劔威ヲ恐レテ 近ク 能ハズ、即チ、大ハ 国ヲ 治ムルノ 大道ニシテ 小ハ 修身 齊家 護身ノ道 ナリ

Ko no mi chi no shin wo e re ba shu ma ko to go to ku ken i wo o so re te, chi ka ku nō ha zu, su na wa chi, dai wa ku ni wo o sa mu ru no ō mi chi ni shi te, sho wa shu shin sei ka go shin no mi chi na ri

If one understands the truth of this path, all demons will fear the power of your sword and will be unable to approach you. In other words, Hōjō is the great path to governing the kingdom, and the small path to self-cultivation and self-preservation.

五、法定ヲ 学ブ 目的ハ 后来習態 ノ 容形ヲ 除キ 本来 清明 ノ 恒体ニ 復スルニ 在リ

Hō jō wo ma na bu mo ku te ki wa kõ rai shū tai no yō kei wo no zo ki hon rai sei mei no kō tai ni fu ku su ru ni a ri

The purpose of learning Hōjō is to eliminate defilements that have arisen in your life and so return to your original pure and clear nature.