

Sen and Hyôshi

(Initiative and rhythm within Shinto Muso Ryu Jodo)

Much has been written about it so, I do not pretend that this is the truth, it's my interpretation based on my experience and what I've learned from my Sensei. I hear more and more, that Kata is boring, only performing fixed shapes. Maybe after you read this, you look with different eyes to Kata training.

When one makes more progress within the system of Shinto Muso Ryu, there will be at a deeper level, more than only the execution of the forms. When one goes deeper within the Kata the practitioner finds a number of elements that are important in order to get what the Kata actually teaches us, to get a better understanding of the whole picture. These elements are all too often overlooked. Two of these elements that we encounter, I would like to explain here. These are the concepts Sen (initiative) and Hyôshi (rhythm).

From a point of view of Hopology, the concept of Sen is described as a moment of control (controlling the action) in a combat situation.

Within the SMR Jodo we distinguish three types of Sen,

- 1) Go no Sen, (responsive action)
- 2) Sen no Sen, (preemptive action)
- 3) Sensen no Sen (pre-active-action)

We don't think about attack and defense as two separate things. The Japanese have a very good expression, 'Kôbô ichi'. The 'Kô' is attack (semeru), 'Bô' is defend or protect, so attack and defense are one.

The general term used in Japanese is called Sen, in English we do have not just a single word for this, maybe "Initiative", comes close to it.

As was mentioned above, we can distinguish three types of Sen. The lowest level is 'Go no Sen', the Go meaning in this case 'Ato', after. The middle level Sen, and then we have the highest level 'Sensen no Sen' which is also difficult to explain.

The 'Go no Sen' application is when the attacks starts, I recognize and counter. He has already placed his attack, his attack is already in, and I counter. All in a flash of a second, that's the lowest level.

Then we have Sen, (the middle level), he has in mind the same thing, he just begins, he's not yet cutting, but just starts to move, then I take it over, counter, so I will control the movement.

Then last is the highest level 'Sensen no Sen', it is very difficult to make an analogy here. Let's assume that he has the same in mind, same technique, he has not even started, I attack already – Sensen no Sen.

Let's see if we can give a picture. We start from a situation in which both have a bokken. He will threaten me and attack, he cuts my head, intent to cut, down to the middle.

I receive it, waiting until the last moment. I receive it, not stop it, by getting my body out of the way, 'Taiko Wasu', counter. Flirting with the death, this is **Go no Sen**.

Sen, (middle level),

Awaseru, we meet swords, he has in mind to thrust, he's in act of launching his attack, I disengage by turning my blade as he is in action, and make a counter thrust. You almost feel what is coming, and you take it over.

Sen and Hyôshi (2)

Let's go back to the concept Awaseru, meeting swords. Awaseru = Ai uchi, I think Awaseru is a symbolic execution of Ai-uchi, the Ma-ai is greater, the danger is less obvious than by Ai-uchi where the Zanshin is many times greater. The rhythm (Hyôshi) will therefore change when we use Awaseru or Ai-uchi, but be careful, because it's not the same, that's what the practitioner must discover. We will come back to that later. The basis of this (attack = defense) is here expressed. These two qualities are reinforcing each other here and should not be separate, also they must be clearly visible when Awaseru is carried out within the Kata.

Sensen, (highest level),

He doesn't know what's going to happen. Awaseru, we meet swords, before he can move I thrust. He thinks and has been taken over, has no chance to move, to make a start, this is Sensen no Sen.

These are some examples to give you an idea of the differences that exist between these three levels of initiative. The Jap. character for Sen can also be read as 'Saki', it means before and even sometimes after in a certain context.

"Now let's see which role rhythm plays in these concepts."

Nishioka Sensei, assumed that there was only Go no Sen, Kiriothoshi f.e. = "**Go no Sen**", always waiting until the last moment. If you assume Awaseru that does not mean you're crossing only the weapons. The Jo will control the sword, Shi controls Uchi until the last moment (before he stops in Seigan no Kamae). Meeting swords does not mean just thoughtlessly crossing the weapons. The Jo in reality cuts the sword down. When Jo goes faster than Uchidachi then the last one takes the initiative and will finally take over the situation. You often see this when Awaseru is demonstrated. If you move early, you're already lost. If you train with different partners you'll see how they react, what they do, this will show you their experience. Form and movement are two different things, You do Awase in form, but you have to keep in mind the other movement. You see him coming, wait, wait, wait and enter, so when your technique is not good you are in trouble. Again one thing is the form, behind it there is this real movement. We can make a link to Uchikomi here. If you don't master the strike you have a big problem, therefore you really have to master these strikes. It is therefore important to observe Uchidachi very well, and you should pay attention to the rhythm of Uchidachi.

Relation between Sen and Hyôshi.

(Sen is actually Hyôshi, it means literally: rhythm or measure of music).

When we look at this in the context of a combat situation, we see a conjunction between the battle that is brought forth by a physical action, the body, breath, and mind. This naturally applies to yourself and your opponent. Hyôshi refers to both a physical and mental activity, you could also speak of a psycho-physical element here. In most classical traditions Hyôshi was a very important factor, but it's not trained anymore by the modern practitioner nowadays. Hyôshi is important if we put it inside a combat situation. You can make an attack in different ways, but each of us does it with a different rhythm. It's depending on the situation, how to start with a certain rhythm. The rhythm changes thereby constantly. Observing and utilizing Hyôshi in a situation where an opponent is in front of you requires a high degree of training, in my opinion this is in particular intuition, (Kan-ken).

Sen and Hyôshi (3)

We distinguish three types of strokes to disrupt the rhythm of the opponent.

- 1) Ai-uchi, both opponents are at the same moment.
- 2) Isurebhyôshi, you continue to follow his movement you're his shadow.
- 3) Koshyôshi, dodging the attack, when it has reached its final phase you make the counter-attack, so, actually Go no Sen.

You can derive from this that the above forms have a strong relationship with Sen, for all three initiative should lie with those who would disturb the rhythm, both passive and active.

Taking Sen and influencing Hyôshi are important factors in the performance of the Kata. In real situations this can be vital but also fatal.

Sen and Hyôshi observed, we can conclude that the Kata of Shinto Muso Ruo Jodo are not simply defined shapes, but these are derived from actual combat situations that have their basis in the Edo period. Apart from the technical aspects related to the handling of the weapon in the Kata, Kata is also used to teach the student various forms of mental and physical qualities. Therefore in my opinion Sen and Hyôshi should be more integrated within the Shinto Muso Ryu training of Jodo. This will then lead to a better understanding of the physical and mental aspects, like breathing and the effectiveness of the combat techniques. And it will bring us finally closer to the essence of Shinto Muso Ryu Jojutsu.

If we look at initiative and define rhythm you can only perform it if your technique is good as mentioned earlier. When you are unable to do this then you have a big problem you are in trouble, this brings me closer to the subject of 'Uchikomi'. I think this is the essence to make progression within Jodo. Kihon Sotai f.e. is a great Uchikomi tool. I will try to describe what I understood about the concept of Uchikomi, according to the words of Nishioka Sensei.

"What is the point of Uchikomi?"

We are testing our use of the 'Hasuji', this means the 'Hasuji' of the Jo. But if you look at the Jo it has no blade. If you don't feel the blade's direction with a sword, then you won't feel the blade of the Jo. It's round and feels always the same, but when you take the grip the blade should be standing. What does standing mean in this case? Its feeling (Honte) should never press down, it comes from the side.

Uchikomi is similar to Makiwara cutting, but without Makiwara. Uchidachi simply lets you try your cut. Uchidachi receives the cut, and makes Shidachi aware of the 'Hasuji'. Uchikomi become a wasting of time when you only see it as a physical activity.

I hope this text will help the future and advanced Jodo practitioner to walk on the path of Shinto Muso Ryu Jodo.

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