

kendo-iaï-naginata

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Roald Knutsen, rokudan Renshi, and Ric Bithell, yondan, attending the Hyogo Kendo Renmei Junior Kendo Taikai, Kobe, November, 2005.

Editorial

Without beating about the bush, there has been rather a long nine year gap since the last Renmei Journal saw the light of day; a lapse that came about through force of circumstance on the Editorial side and – well, no excuses – at least we are here again and suitably apologetic! Now that in the ensuing years modern technology has replaced the antiquated copying and postal system that we used to use, almost as out-of-date as some printing methods that were current even thirty years ago, we hope to publish this journal on the Renmei website and thus reach a far wider interested readership than was ever the case in the past.

One of the disadvantages experienced by traditional Budo, and particularly Kendo and the classical *bugei* (martial arts proper) of Japan, has been a reluctance to push forward the somewhat ‘conservative’ values of the older ‘ways’ to counteract the rather aggressive and, one is sorry to say, shallower attractions of competitive Budo.

Taking Kendo, specifically, it is true to say that the first ‘recorded’ three-point matches took place in the mid-sixteenth century. Whatever form such early matches took is probably difficult to conceive now, although one can be sure that samurai honour and pride would have ensured the encounters were short and probably violent. There was a clear distinction made, even in the late-Muromachi period, between contests using *fukuro-shinai* – the forerunner of the present bamboo shinai, the wooden *bokuto*, and live-blade *shinken-shobu*. In general terms, this

distinction certainly lasted to the closing years of the Meiji period, and in a slightly modified form throughout the first sixty or seventy years of the twentieth century. However, ‘modernisation’ and ‘political correctness’ have meant that competitive matches, always an understandable and attractive proposition to young people, have tended to emasculate the older Kendo entities to the point that the great majority see match-Kendo as the modern and only way. While it is true that one can still find many ‘old-style’ masters guiding their students in the traditional ways in Japan, finding such dojo can be difficult especially for a non-Japanese student.

Without elaborating further, progress into the twenty-first century has permitted a blurring of the clear distinction between *satsujin-ken* and *katsujin-ken*, the ‘sword used for killing’ and the ‘sword used to preserve life’. There has also been a marked slackening in understanding and following the principles contained in Kendo reigi, or discipline. Both these aspects of the more traditional Kendo remain at the centre of the British Kendo Renmei’s philosophy. Not artificial rules, other than the long-established methods developed within Kendo and the other traditional entities over many centuries, but the more recent introduction of seemingly pointless rules only pertinent to the conduct of competitive matches.

One of the aims of this Journal is to help those who wish to broaden and deepen their understanding of Budo by providing information on published material in English. It should be remembered, perhaps, that the two ‘official’ languages of Kendo are Japanese and English. One feels that a criticism that might be levelled at the Kendo authorities is that they seem to have made only a very small effort to implement the availability of English information over the past forty years, and a large proportion of the material that has been published has been either somewhat superficial or biased towards the very competitive sports aspects that obscure to older and more valuable traditions. This Journal will make every effort to recommend those publications that are easily available and present our Budo in a reliable form.

So, you can expect to find some degree of comment here; comment that may on occasion go against the grain, but it will always aim to be independent and to reflect, in so far as we are able, the tradition.

The Kendo Reader by Nōma Hisashi (1910-1939)

Introduction

Renmei members know only too well that there are very few, if any, serious publications dealing with Kendo in the technical sense and that the dojo leaders are inclined to take the traditional view that technical understanding can really only derive from prolonged practical experience gained in the dojo. In this aspect all sides, traditional or competitive, are more or less agreed; Kendo knowledge can only come from personal hands-on experience and a long period of time. On the other hand, often clear explanations given by good teachers can help to fill in the background and allow the student a greater feeling of achieving through ‘feeding’ his or her interest. Such informed comment will act as a guide to the pathway forward by providing the student with a glimpse of what will be once his ‘experience of Kendo’ takes root deep in his memory.

One such publication was written about seventy years ago by a young Kendo master, Noma Hisashi, who was himself a pupil of a number of famous swordsmen active in the two decades before WW II. Over the forthcoming issues we hope to bring you translations of Noma’s excellent work made by Phil Jupp, 6th dan, with the assistance of his wife, Kinyo. The original book was published in Japanese in 1939, we think, by Kodansha, but as the original is not to hand and the copyright may well be long since defunct, we feel that our translation will present material of great value to Kendo students – and Budo students, too. We trust that this reason will be accepted in the spirit that it is given.

Before continuing, some brief biographical details about Noma Hisashi might be of interest. He was born on the 24th April, 1910, the son of Noma Seiji and Saeko. His maternal grandfather, Noma Yoshio, trained under a famous swordsman of the mid-Meiji period, Mori Yozo, who was a senior student (*uchi-desshi*) in the dojo of Chiba Shusaku. His grandmother was the eldest daughter of Mori Yozo and a skilled exponent of Kendo, Kusarigama, and especially of Naginata. His father, Seiji, was also skilled in Kendo and devoted much energy to it.

When he was just 15, Hisashi joined the Yushinkan Dojo where he was instructed by the famous master, Nakayama Hakudo sensei. This was in 1924. Two years later in 1926, he began to receive instruction from Masuda Shinsuke sensei and in the same year transferred to the newly established Noma Dojo. Here, Hisashi began the instruction of children. The dojo seniors, and probably some of the older juniors, too, undertook special

Winter and Summer training at Ikaho in Chiba Prefecture and at Ito. Various sensei from across the country attended these special practices, including Takano Sasaburo Hanshi, 10th dan. Laconically, these practices may be described as severe.

At the age of just 21, on 1st July, 1930, Hisashi was presented with the prestigious Kendo Seiren Award by H.H. Prince Nashimoto Miyamori Masao, chairman of the Dai Nippon Butokukai. In the same year he began training at the Noma Dojo under Mochida Moriji Hanshi. During the year 1934, Hisashi undertook *musha-shugyo* to Kyoto and other parts of the Kansai and Chugoku district, and in September he entered and won the Army Kendo Tournament. He received the Army Trophy from the Army Minister, Shirakawa Yoshinori, himself.

At the beginning of March, 1935, aged 26, he was awarded the teaching degree of *Renshi* from Prince Nashimoto Miyamori Masao. April was spent training in Kyushu and in May, as the representative for Tokyo, he entered and won a Tournament held before the Emperor in honour of the birth of the Crown Prince.

At the age of 30, on 6th July, 1939, Hisashi was awarded the teaching degree of *Kyoshi* by Prince Nashimoto. Sadly, after this remarkable but all too brief career, Noma Hisashi fell ill and passed away on the 7th November.

We are fortunate that his legacy is his excellent study of Kendo which doubtless reflects a great deal of the extremely high level teaching that he received from the above named sensei.

Why Practice Kendo?

Why do it? Before starting any activity this is the first question that naturally comes to mind, and when one has fully satisfied oneself as to the reasons for doing it and the task is begun, not only does one feel assured that one's efforts will not be misplaced but one is also able to concentrate all one's strength on what is crucial for its achievement; consequently, the task comes to life.

Even so, if we must always be asking ourselves the question: '*Why do it?*' and embarking on nothing until we have worked out the reasons for everything we will do we are likely to run into problems.

'Why was I born?', 'Why should I carry on living?', 'Why do I have to work?' and so on. This line of thought is not necessarily meaningless, but if we try too hard to seek answers to the question 'Why do it?' then our doubts and confusion will only increase resulting in an unmanageable situation. Honen Shonin (1133-1212), founder of the Buddhist Jodo sect, is recorded to have said: 'Just continue, single-mindedly, with the invocations', as a shortcut to the attaining of bliss.

Again, surely it must be said that there can be nothing more detrimental to our endeavours than to consider as most correct our own shallow and immature ideas and to decide for ourselves all the answers to the question 'Why do it?' During one's years of immaturity one must be especially careful not to become a victim of one's own dogmatic attitude. When one's thoughts and ideas seem incomplete seek the opinions of others, or else, just follow the instruction given by those who are senior to oneself; this must surely be the correct path.

It is the same with the question: 'Why practice Kendo?' Because this cannot be easily answered does one refuse to practice Kendo? Even if one sought deeply into finding an answer to this problem one would find it a most difficult one to solve. Even if the problem could be said to be partially solved one's answer will not necessarily account for anything of real significance.

That being said, it may be that the dwelling on this problem would in some sense serve to heighten one's perception and understanding of Kendo. It may also be useful in forming a positive attitude towards Kendo. I have related some simple examples of observations and attitudes pertaining to Kendo. Among them I have also added some of my own thoughts on the subject and I leave it to the reader to judge their merits for himself.

It is not certain just when the sword came into widespread use, but that they were in use in ancient times has been proved, and it is a fact of history. With the development of the sword it also became necessary to research into the most effective way of their use. Thus the skill and development of technique itself became an ongoing concern which in turn ultimately gave birth to the *Michi*, or Way, of the sword. We can say then that the wellsprings of Kendo were formed far back in ancient times.

Later, the systemised and organised forms and styles of Kendo and the ancestral families of Masters in the art, known as *Shihan-ke*^{*}, seem to have first appeared during the Muromachi period (1338-1573). From then on the

skill of swordsmanship passed through each historical phase, through times of growth and decline, and while experiencing many changes over the course of time, it never disappeared altogether. Rather, it seems to have enjoyed a healthy development up to the present day which is something we should be grateful for.

Now I would like to tell you about an old man of very stern character whom I once knew. He had practiced Kendo for more than twenty years during which time he had never missed a single day's training. Regardless of whether it was extremely hot or cold he continued to train with ceaseless enthusiasm. Throughout this period he never had any particular desires or ambitions about becoming especially strong or skilful, instead he just kept on training for the simple reason that he enjoyed it. Setting aside the question of his actual ability, he told me that he had never once caught a cold and that, as far as he was concerned, it was all due to the training.

People practice Kendo for many different reasons. There are those who attempt to master it as *Bujutsu*, others who practice it as a form of physical exercise, some emphasise it as a form of ascetic exercise, still others see it as a sport, some practice simply because they enjoy it, others who simply have an interest in contest using *shinai*. In general however, it seems to be most broadly perceived of as either a form of physical exercise, or, character cultivation. In other words, the basic aims of Kendo are thought to be spiritual cultivation and physical discipline. This appears to be the order of the present day as regards the practice of Kendo and it does indeed appear to be a line of thought adopted to the times. Unfortunately, however, it also seems to indicate the tendency most people have of paying scant respect to the original *Bujutsu* role of Kendo, ie. 'to destroy the enemy and protect oneself'.

Nowadays, apart from the unique situations that arise in times of war, there are almost no opportunities for us to cross swords in mortal combat. In place of the sword there are now far more advanced and efficient weapons available such as the machine gun and pistol. Consequently, to say that the aim of Kendo is to 'destroy the enemy and protect oneself' is naturally going to invite ridicule for such an outmoded idea.

No, within Kendo there is something else to be sought of much greater value, something of profound spiritual significance. But to learn of this significance one cannot bypass the original function of Kendo as *Bujutsu*, ie. 'to destroy the enemy and protect oneself'. It is only through a deadly earnest, razor-edged course of Kendo training that one can truly experience the lofty Way towards spiritual understanding.

To class Kendo as merely another form of physical exercise is to view it as just another form of sport, and to do that I think is to miss the mark completely. Having said that, I do not want it to appear that I do not acknowledge the excellent attributes that sport have to offer, not only from the aspect of physical exercise but also their spiritual aims. It is just that Budo was devised for and deployed in situations where very often one's life itself was at risk. For this crucial reason it differs greatly from sport, and it is upon this point that the true value of Budo is to be found. Therefore, I must emphasise strongly that if one ignores the original function of Kendo as *Bujutsu*, where life and death are held in the balance, then one greatly diminishes the value of Kendo.

Although it is quite alright to view Kendo in the light of physical exercise and character cultivation, if in any situation one forgets the primary role of *Bujutsu* one will not be able to comprehend the true meaning of Kendo. As was said earlier, in this day and age there are practically no opportunities for mortal combat with the sword (*shinken shobu*). If that is the case how is one then to come even close to experiencing the mental state of *shinken shobu*, of bringing Kendo to life as *Bujutsu*? The answer is to attach great importance to the outcome of serious one-to-one engagements (*shohai*). In Budo *shohai* must be held in the highest regard. Questions of *shohai* may sometimes have to be set aside for purposes of instruction, and so on, but *shohai* is the difference between life and death, be it with real sword or *shinai*. It is vital to realise that to be defeated means that one's life is lost.

The method for achieving victory is encompassed within *Michi*. To put it another way. Through long and serious training and investigation into the ways and means of taking victory one finally becomes master of them, and this is the path of *Michi*. The word *Michi* encompasses both art or skill and ways and means. If we delve even deeper to the ultimate concept we even discover that it includes the Will of God, the Law of the Universe, and Truth itself. Where the Will of God, the Law of the Universe, and Truth are revealed there lies the law for obtaining victory, and it is this law we shall arrive at if we comprehend the principles of *shohai*. In Buddhism this understanding is known as *Bodai*, or *Satori*. Through *Ken* (the Sword) we may awaken to the meaning of life, and even beyond to the Laws of Heaven and Earth and the Truth of the Universe. This, I think it may be said, is the ultimate aim of *Michi*.

To comprehend the basic law of one *Michi* is to comprehend the laws of all others; this is the great value of *Michi*. Thus it is not enough to study and master *Ken* alone. This 'principle of all *Michi*' is known as *Ippō Banpō*[†], and is supported by the words of Miyamoto Musashi[‡]: 'Trusting all to the Laws of *Heiho* (the arts of war), in mastering the arts and skills, and in all things, I have no need of teachers'.

Concerning the aims of Kendo, in mastering the arts and skills, and in all things, I have no need of teachers’.

Concerning the aims of Kendo Yamaoka Tesshu[§] wrote the following:

‘People believe that the reason for mastering swordsmanship is to be able to cut down one’s enemies. For myself, however, I seek to master swordsmanship because through it I seek divine principle. If once I attain this my heart will be as still water, calm and quiet. Like a clear mirror lucid and bright, able to cope instantly with any situation. For when faced with any incident my spirit will react of its own. Of what comes to pass my comprehension of it will be instantaneous. To truly attain to this plane is to be one with the Way of Heaven. Through earnest training and by clearing the mind (Kokoro), I seek only to awaken to the one root Principle of the Heavens.’

Tesshu, who emphasised the practice of Ken as Bujutsu, here indicates clearly the higher aims of Kendo. The above passage was written by Tesshu when he was a mere twenty-three years of age. Later, in the ‘*Kenpō Jasei no Ben*’ he wrote:

‘The secrets of Kenpō do not stop at being merely the secrets of Kenpō. Having gained this knowledge one may apply it on the battlefield, in government, in diplomacy, in education and religion, in trade, manufacturing and farming; only good will result from it. This is why I say that the ‘Truth of Kenpō’ is part of the Ultimate Truth of all creation’.

Does this not settle the point of how all human action is intimately connected to the highest aims of humanity? Therefore, simply put, I like to think that the highest aim of humanity is to make this place a better place, in accordance with the Will of the Highest and Almighty. And, although it may be necessary to view Kendo from various angles, in the end, by attaching the value of Kendo to the highest aims of humanity, we will, I believe, be adding all the more to the achievement of this quest.

I have raised a number of points above, but after all is said and done, Kendo is not something to merely theorise about, it is something that must be put into practice. Or rather we can say that the true value of Kendo lies at the point where theory and action come together in unity. Old wisdom says: ‘*What cannot be put into practice does not exist within Michi*’.

(To be continued)

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Notes

* *Kendo Shihan-ke*: The first master of importance is thought to have been Iizasa Yamashiro-no-kami Ienao, of Katori, Shimosa (Chiba Prefecture), who founded the Tenjin Shoden Shinto-ryu, (1387-1488).

† *Ippō Banpō*: all truth is of the same root. This is also alluded to in the *Itto-ryu no Densho*: ‘The law of the one sword stroke is that of ten-thousand sword strokes, and the law of ten-thousand sword strokes is that of the one’.

‡ Miyamoto Musashi, (1584-1645), founder of the Ni-ten Ichi-ryu and author of the *Gorin-no-sho*, *Heihō Sanjugo Kajo*, etc. He also excelled in the *sumi-e* (ink) painting.

§ Yamaoka Tesshu, (1836-1888), swordsman of the Bakumatsu and Meiji periods. Other names were: Kōhō and Tetsutarō. During his youth he practiced the Shinkage-ryu under Kusumi Kantekisai, and later under Asari Yoshiaki of the Ito-ryu. He finally founded his own style which he named the Muto-ryu. His dojo was called the Shunpu-kan.

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Bookshelf

The questions posed by Noma Hisashi are as valid today as they were seventy years ago. One way towards finding answers that this Journal recommends to aspiring novices, and those in all the lower ranks even with years of experience, is to acquire and read sound background material about Japanese culture. What better way for a non-Japanese is to dip into the lively, well-written biographical sketches contained in Sugawara Makoto's *'Lives of Master Swordsmen'*? Many of the accounts contained in this excellent work will give the new Kendo student a taste of the often colourful life that the medieval samurai swordsmen lived, but also familiarise him with Japanese names, the warrior ethos, etc., and generally fire-up interest.

It is always useful for the students, or ones with the inclination to do so, to gain a general working knowledge of Japanese warrior history. This can remain in broad terms but will always prove useful particularly in reading material like this Journal. In any case, the warrior history is often synonymous with the development of the classical bugei (martial arts) and the later transition to budo. One of the best books available outlining the historical development of the samurai is again by Sugawara Makoto and is his *'The Ancient Samurai'*. Like *'Lives of Master Swordsmen'*, Sugawara-san has kept his prose factual but always interesting. This is no work of stodgy history; its only failing is the lack of an index, but don't let that deter you.

The distributor of both these books is **'The East'**, a Japan-based publisher of a bi-monthly journal of the same title. The journal, itself, contains a wide range of informative articles covering historical, contemporary, literary, and cultural subjects; additionally, these articles are always very well illustrated.

Both *'Lives of Master Swordsmen'* and *'The Ancient Samurai'* are available through *'Kendo – Iai – Naginata'* at £24.95 (plus p. & p.)

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Critique given after practice to some of the lower yudansha at the Kobe Isshinkan Dojo.

Visits to Japan

Over the long interval when this Journal was suspended there have been four important visits to Japan, all centred on the Kansai and Chugoku. These were in 1998, 2002, 2004 and 2005. The main purpose of these periods was to maintain and strengthen contacts with Kendo in Kyoto, Osaka, Kobe, Hiroshima, and Nara. In 2004, Phil Jupp, 6th dan, also travelled through the Kanto and Kansai to renew his Kendo friendships and practice with various masters.

During the last visit, Ric Bithell, 4th dan, and Roald Knutsen, 6th dan, were invited to attend the 50th Anniversary Dinner of the Isshinkan Dojo in Kobe. The dojo Chairman is Ozaki Yoshihiro sensei, a very good friend of this

Renmei going back over forty years into the time of his late-father. Many 8th *dan* *Kyoshi* and *Hanshi* from all over Japan also attended this function and it was a pleasure to meet once again with so many Kendo friends. In Kyoto, it was a particular pleasure to be able to meet and have long talks with Ohta Hirokata *sensei*. This *sensei* is now ninety-two but still has tremendous energy for Kendo in both Osaka and Kyoto. His grandson recently returned to Japan after spending two years at the home of Roald and Pat Knutsen.

At the beginning of September coming, a young Brighton Butokukan member, Thomas Bowen, 2nd *dan*, will go to Japan, centred on the dojo of Inoue Tomoshige *sensei* in Kobe, for two months. This dojo has a large junior membership and is an offshoot of the Isshinkan Dojo. This will give Thomas a memorable and valuable experience, particularly as he has already been practicing Kendo under Pat Knutsen, 6th *dan*, for ten years since he was eight. We will report on his experiences in more detail in a later issue.

Whilst on the subject of comparatively recent events, we should note that in May last year the Butokukan Dojo celebrated its 40th Anniversary with a practice and demonstration of the member's skills in both Kendo and Iai. This took place in the splendidly refurbished Assembly Room of Lewes Town Hall and was attended by many guests including old members. Phil Jupp and Steve Phillips, *rokudan* and *godan* respectively, demonstrated the intricate and complex Goho-no-kata of the Jiki-Shinkage-ryu, last shown some years previously, if records are correct. The demonstrations were followed by lively and enthusiastic practice by the juniors under the eagle eye of Pat Knutsen, and then by the seniors. The proceedings were rounded off by the usual Butokukan buffet reception, something one suspects that is considered important by the famished Kendoka. It must be the Sussex air . . .

Japan, 2002 and 2005

Kendo always forms an important central element to any visit to Japan for members of the British Kendo Renmei but the last two schedules have been slightly modified by Roald Knutsen's physical knee problems. Instead of total focus on Kendo and Iai practice, there has been a greater opportunity to extend his parallel interest in aspects of the metaphysical background and the close historical connections between the classical bugei and the theories advanced by the Chinese military philosophers such as Sun Tzu. This side of the developing bugei during the mid- and late-Muromachi period has often been overlooked outside Japanese-speaking Kendo but is nonetheless of great interest and importance,

Both these visits included spending several days on or in close proximity to parts of the famous medieval Kumano Kodō in the high mountains south of Nara and in Wakayama Prefecture. These, for there are several of these 'old-roads', were trodden throughout the past twelve-hundred years by the strange, wandering Shugendo yamabushi ascetics, many of whose beliefs so deeply influenced the early bugei. These ancient roadways often follow far from easy routes, sometimes relatively level or gently inclined, (if such a thing is possible in Japan), but at others clinging precariously to the steep mountain ridges. This is particularly the case in the deeply interesting Yoshino-yama/Ōmine area of southern Nara Prefecture.

At Yoshino-yama, a village perched along a narrow ridge and reached by a ropeway or precipitous winding hairpin roads, the sacred ancient route starts at the Kimpusanji temple, (Shingon) within the grounds of which stands the second largest wooden building in Japan, the Zaō-dō. (The largest wooden structure, now considerably shrunk in size through fire in the medieval period, houses the great Buddha adjacent to the Kasuga Shrine in Nara). The Zaō-dō contains a famous, but rarely seen, statue of the fierce deity Zaō-Gongen, that attracts the veneration of many thousands of pilgrims, tourists and latter-day yamabushi. Don't be put off by this should you feel like including a visit to this wonderful place, such clouds of visitors have flocked there for more than a thousand years.

This great structure is one of the starting points for the 'Four Entries' into the mountain fastnesses, central to Shugendo and, to some extent, the Shingon ascetics. Walking through the narrow winding main street of the village brings the pilgrim or ascetic past the rather beautiful and very interesting Kiyomizu-jinja, also closely associated with Shugendo, and the start of a two or three kilometre stiff uphill walk to the Mikamari-jinja situated almost a thousand feet above Yoshino village. This shrine is a gem of late-Muromachi architecture with its triple-gabled *shinden* which sits, unusually, on a long platform constructed eight or ten feet above the oblong central garden. The structure was built by Toyotomi Hideyoshi and enshrines the *mitama* of the Rain deity. The shrine is also used by the yamabushi and in the open fronted building opposite the shinden one can see a highly interesting collection of sacred agricultural tools used, amongst other things, in the rice planting festival, as well as many votive offerings and prayers for the well-being (or repose) of infant children.

Another kilometre or two up the mountain, the pilgrim reaches the actual entry *torii* gateway marking the beginning of the Kumano Kodō as it ascends to the wild Ōmine massif, first passing the Ōmine-jinja, a surprisingly modest building. Some distance further on pilgrims reach a marker post known as the *Nyonin-kekka* announcing ‘No women beyond this point’. Until only a few years ago, and even now in some quarters, women were considered impure and permitted only just so far along the sacred *mandala* that is the Kumano Kodo. The same custom was strictly applied at a number of other places where the four seasonal ‘Entries’ of Shugendo were effected. From the Ōmine-jinja the old trackway meanders over serious mountain terrain, passing many sacred sites along its route where the yamabushi perform their esoteric rituals, to finally reach the first of the great shrines in the south of Kumano more than one-hundred-and-seventy kilometres distant. This first shrine is the Kumano Hongu-taisha, and then the route takes in the Kumano-Nachi-taisha, sited spectacularly opposite the imposing and sacred Nachi waterfall where three narrow ‘swordblades’ of water drop vertically down the sheer cliff one-hundred-and-thirty-three meters. Adjacent to the main shrine perched high on the mountainside, is the Shingon temple called the Seigantō-ji, where the Buddhist esoterism and that of the Shugendo almost inextricably merge.

From Nachi along the coast to the small town of Shingu is just a few miles and here is the third of the great sites, the spectacularly vermillion painted Hayatama-taisha. Some people find these brilliant red painted Hachiman shrines gaudy and dull but they really should do their homework before visiting because there are always mysteries to be found. In the case of the Hayatama-taisha the important deities enshrined there are those associated with the semi-mythical and almost legendary ‘Land-taking’ that took place somewhere just under two-thousand years ago – all three of these important shrines enshrine a number of these deities, sometimes the same *kami* but under an alternative name – and mark the supposed establishment of the later Yamato clan’s supremacy. In the case of the Hayatama-taisha, this was the place at the mouth of the Kumano River that saw the landfall of the mythical chieftain, Jimmu, after his long journey east from Kyushu through the Inland Sea. Nestling between and almost dwarfed by two of the much larger shrine *shinden* is a comparatively minute *shinden* that houses the first three deities named in the Kojiki chronicle (early 8th cent.) wherein are collected many of the earliest myths and legends that later justified the existence of the Yamato rule. These three deities are: Toyo-kumo-nu, ‘cloud-master’; U-hiji-ni, ‘first-mud’; and Suhi-ji-ni, ‘sand-and-mud’. The true significance of these three deities is now completely lost although some theories exist, and at this shrine, where their *mitama* are housed, apparently no one knows at all. Perhaps they symbolise the approach to land by Jimmu’s flotilla, first seeing the clouds over the still invisible coastline, then soundings in the coastal mud, and finally the finding of firm sands where it was safe to land? The first named ‘earth’ *kami* is also enshrined at the Nachi-taisha, although no one could point out where! Who knows, it is all a true mystery . . . ?



The diminutive *shinden* dedicated to the three ‘earth’ *kami* at the Kumano Hayatama-jingu, Wakayama-ken.

Visiting all these major and a number of minor shrines has drawn the early mythology that later influenced the developing warrior class into a sharper perspective. There is an essential ‘timelessness’ to be found in many parts of rural Japan that only the most insensitive of travellers would miss, but to absorb the atmosphere of this ancient sacred region is indeed to touch ‘the wellsprings of early Japanese culture’, especially in trying to make sense of

primitive Shinto. By 'primitive' is meant 'pre-shrine' Shinto; those beliefs that formed the folk-religion in the long span of years before the mid-8th century. It is some of these deeply imbedded folk beliefs so closely connected to the emerging yamabushi that are to be found in the tengu lore of the Muromachi bugei.

The two visits proved extremely valuable in providing a greater insight into the warrior inspiration underlying some, at least, of the bugei that flowered so dramatically during the Muromachi and Momoyama periods (1573-1603). (The results of this and utilising the considerable help given by two Kendo masters in Kobe, will be the subject of Roald Knutsen's forthcoming book, *Sun Tzu and the Art of Medieval Japanese Warfare*, to be published this autumn or winter by Global Oriental, Folkestone).

The beauty of the mountainous Kumano region has always provided a strong attraction to visitors throughout the ages. Almost as soon as interest in these esoteric centres grew in the ninth century, pilgrims and ascetics began to penetrate these fastnesses where numbers of Taoist mystics already led solitary lives as hermits, surely under the protection of the proto-yamabushi, and made their difficult way down to the Kumano-*sanzan* (three) shrines. One Emperor in the Heian period a thousand years ago undertook the pilgrimage (with his entourage, presumably) more than thirty times during his reign. I have to say, the mind boggles at the seriousness of such undertakings at that period! The popularity of these pilgrimages attracted many warriors, too, and a good proportion surely did it the hard way south along the Ōmine route.

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Four years ago, Roald Knutsen was fortunate enough to be extended an invitation to visit a very orthodox dojo perched high up in a mountainside village on the eastern flanks of the Yoshino-Ōmine massif. In this simple dojo he observed some of the best Kendo he had ever experienced over many visits to Japan. There was, naturally, hard *kakarigeiko* and *keiko*, a strict observance of *reigi* in all its complex aspects but, above all, a certain strong camaraderie binding the members of all ranks such as might have been found in the dojo of some famous Kendo masters of the late Edo period, just before and during Bakumatsu. This form of strict attention to *reigi* must have been typical of much of Edo period Kendo but is interesting because of the contrast it presents with the more relaxed 'familial' *reigi* to be experienced in some Bujutsu groups whose origins can be traced back to the far more violent 16th century.

The dojo master, a hachidan Kyoshi, delivered a critique at the close of practice stressing the need for all students to always strive to correct their 'form' and do everything with full spirit. 'It is extremely important to extend your full spirit at the first onset of each practice, whoever the opponent and regardless of rank'. He referred, of course, to the junior opposing the senior in *keiko*, the senior always being conscious of his technical superiority over the lower ranking opponent. This 'first meeting' should be in the spirit of *shinken shobu*, opposing one's opponent as though you were both armed with 'live' blade swords. One's awareness and determination to do one's best are high at the early stage of practice; what happens afterwards is of lesser importance because the later stages are only training. Of course, the later practices are when you are becoming tired and have great value in forcing the student to raise his determination and spirit, thus reflecting the basic Kendo value of always ending every aspect of training on an upwards 'beat'. In the Kawakami Dojo, as in many other classical groups, a brief but sharp *kakarigeiko* and final spirited *kirikaeshi* reflected the teaching at the close and was verbally marked in the sensei's critique.

As always, these are points made by all traditional Kendo teachers, and heard many times over the years. Students should take them to heart and, hopefully, recall the admonitions from their memory every time they come to train. Remember the old Kendo maxim: '*to know and to act are one and the same thing*'.

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