

Collected Orphan Articles

Early Jodo and Iaido in Canada



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This is a collection of various articles written for publications that are, mainly, no longer in print. They were found on my computer while I was “cleaning house” and so they are not in complete sets. For the most part I would say they are fairly old, still, budo doesn’t change all that much so there may be some things of interest to you here.

Research and Writing

Kendo World 2014

After exactly 20 years I have gone back to writing the series of books on the Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu, my koryu iaido practice. The last of the manuals on the core solo kata was published in 1994 and recently I finished a fourth book on the partner kata. I have a couple left to clean up some loose ends but it's a relief to be so close to the end of a 20 year project.

Why so long? Well actually the question might rather be, why the nerve to write a book on a martial art when you have a bit less than ten years experience. I wrote those first manuals rather early in my career.

The thing is, early is the best time to write an instructional book. If I were to write on the solo forms of iai now I might not ever get it done, I wouldn't know what to leave out and I would be paralyzed trying to remember everything I wanted to pass along. No, the time to write a manual is when you know the basics but not much else, you simply write "everything" you know. The other reason for doing it young is that in your experience there's only one correct way of doing the kata. So you see, a beginner will know what to write and will write from a confident authority. My sensei once remarked "You barely learn a set of kata and you've got a book written!" Actually, I had my notes written, they were just in book form.

Iwata Norikazu said he wrote his first book on iai at around my current age, but was afraid it would not be received well. He didn't print it for many years and re-wrote it five times. I believe it, I can't look at any of my books without wanting to add to them, although in my conceit I don't see anything vital to correct. Finally, as a high ranked person of long experience Iwata sensei published his book and says it was received relatively well. Everyone, of course, believes that an authority has the right to write a book, one just has to earn that authority. Fastest way to become an authority it seems, is to write a book, sort of a circular thing.

My books were published early, and self-published at that, so I had no rejection letters from publishing houses and few criticisms from my elders since there were few of those who read English. The books sold well as there was essentially no competition, which is another reason I didn't catch much trouble. After all it's hard to say "you shouldn't write a book" if you can't point to an alternative.

So why a 20 year gap? Let's just say I learned too much, I hit a long patch where there was too much to say and any book I wrote would be 300 pages long. It has taken a lot of years of study and teaching to finally get back to knowing what should be written down and what should be left for the students to fill in. The partner practice manuals are short enough to be useful, around the same length as my other books, so I'm pleased enough to format them and perhaps soon they'll be printed and available.

The last manual was another story entirely, as I went back to being a beginner. After 30 years of training I have gone "back to the books" and am working on the lesser practised aspects of Muso Jikiden. I've been seeking out what writings I can find, filling in gaps, thinking and testing to work out the jujutsu of iaido.

I do expect to get into trouble for this one, but after 30 years of not much new information showing up here in the west, I'm looking forward to being corrected. Research is what we should do throughout our careers as students and instructors in the arts, and the koryu will go extinct if we don't keep at it. The koryu iai I practise is not a defined entity like the kendo federation "seitei iai", it is not a single stream, it's the delta, a meandering set of branched channels that unite and break apart. All head in the same general direction, but they are not following the same path. MJER has no single head, it's too big and too diverse geographically to be kept to a single method. As a result, things are added here, lost over there, but not fully forgotten if the members keep dredging up the stuff that has drifted out of sight.

My project for the last year or so has been to remember something I never knew. I am doing that by using other people's memory, their books, photographs and videos. Those memories are then filtered through my own understanding and tested on my students who are remarkably tolerant of my experiments. Out of it will come a manual on three sets of kata dealing with some quite basic jujutsu.

All this sounds like a bit of an advert, but trust me, it is not. It is an attempt to show the two viewpoints on koryu. Those who believe that only what you have been taught, voice to ear, by a fully licensed and elderly instructor is legitimate, will be gritting their teeth at the idea of some Westerner "making stuff up" out of bits and scraps of gossip. The other camp, which obviously includes me, says that arts can grow, understanding can come with experience, the kata can teach just by being performed and not everything in an art need be handed over from fingertip to fingertip.

Research is what every 30 year student of the art should be engaged in, and that research should be shared. Hoarding or even refusing to recognize insight into the art will surely make it small as the knowledge is lost. If you have taught for 20 years, if you have lost your teachers, what is left but thought, research and your own insight? Memory fades and changes no matter what, books endure, photographs capture and video preserves for those who come after.

The Zen Ken Ren iai and jo kata are well in hand, the organization will preserve them so all we need do is attend the seminars to catch up on the details. The koryu are another matter, they are the responsibility of each teacher, each student to carry on, make our own, to grow and refine. Who else is doing it but you? When you retire, pick up those old books and your pen.

What about Kendo? Look to the statement of intent for your national organization, see if it contains something like ours, something which says one of the aims of the organization is to research into the art and improve the techniques. Art or Sport, both will benefit from research, your research.

So this is a plea to those still reading, pick up your pen and write, or use the video on your smart phone and record what you've learned over the past 20 years. Don't let me catch all the cursing by myself, and leave something for the students of your students.

THE PRACTICE OF SEIZA

Seiza is a method of sitting which, in Japan, is used as psychotherapy. It is a way of sitting on the knees that is used extensively in the martial arts of Iaido and Aikido. Practice of seiza can involve either of these arts or can be done simply as a sitting exercise.

Quiet sitting using the seiza posture is a way to overcome the generalized fears of life and the underlying fear of death. It is an excellent way to regulate the body functions. It can bring the mind closer to the world "as it is" rather than its usual residence in "things as they should be". In other words, seiza is a method of breaking through the illusion of everyday life. When sitting, the endless cycles of thought which are so crippling to mental health are broken and the clean freshness of simply living in the world is allowed to come forth.

To sit in seiza bend your legs and place the left knee on the floor. Place the right knee down about two fist widths from the left. Now flip down the toes and place the feet onto the floor so that the big toes just touch each other. Lower the buttocks down so that they rest on or between the heels. Straighten up and let the lower back move forward so that there is an S shaped curve to the spine. Rounding out the lower back to the rear or trying to sit back too far will cause muscle fatigue. The weight should be centred somewhere between the top of the feet and the knees, more toward the feet.

The head is carried in balance on top of the spine. The ears should be in line with the shoulders and the nose in line with the belly button. Pull the chin in slightly and stretch the back of the neck. This should feel as if someone is pulling straight up on the hair to stretch the spine. To find the centreline rock in circles from the hips, slowly reducing the swings until coming to rest in a stable position. This centring is important to prevent muscle cramps or fatigue while sitting.

Relax the shoulders and let the arms fall downward naturally. The right hand is placed palm upward on the lap with the little finger edge lightly touching the lower abdomen. The left hand is placed on top of the right, palm upward as well. The fingers should be together without strain. Place the tips of the thumbs together so that they are just touching with no pressure. The thumbs and fingers should make an oval shape around a point about 2 to 3 inches below the navel. This point is called the tanden or seika tanden and corresponds roughly to the centre of balance. The left hand over the right represents the calm ("Sei" or "In" in Japanese) aspects covering the active ("Do" or "Yo") aspects. The thumbs unify the two. The tanden is seen as the centre of being around which the Hara or hip girdle is organized. The centre is the point from which the life is lived.

Variations of this form are sometimes used but this is the most balanced and relaxed method of sitting.

Without tipping the head forward lower the eyes and look at a spot centred about one metre in front of the knees. The nose should be in the field of vision or the head has dropped forward. This serves to half close the eyes cutting out most of the visual input without providing the conditions to fall asleep. Place the tongue on the roof of the mouth and place the teeth lightly together. Draw the air out of the space between the tongue and the palate. This will cut down on saliva production and the need to swallow.

Breathing is done in a very specific fashion and is the most important aspect of the practice. The ancient Taoists believed that breath was life and that each was only allotted so many. Deep slow breathing then was seen as life prolonging.

Inhale easily and quietly through the nose using the diaphragm. The belly should expand forward while the chest should expand without any muscular assistance at all. Keep all tension and muscular effort out of the upper body. The shoulders should not move upward at all but don't hold them down, simply let gravity do the work.

Breath in until the lungs are full and no further, let the breath dictate the turnover to exhalation. Don't hold the breath or do anything special, simply begin to exhale. The exhalation is even more gentle than the inhalation. There should be no noise or fuss, simply breath out softly, letting the belly collapse. Breath out until the need to breath in is felt, then change over to inhalation.

Never force the breath at any time. With practice the rhythm will slow down to perhaps two breaths a minute but don't try to reach any goals, just breath quietly.

Following the breath, count both inhalations and exhalations or, later, exhalations only. Count from one to ten and then start over. If the count is lost, start at one again, don't try to remember the last number, it's not important. Getting to ten should not be a contest or a goal, just count. Any thoughts that arise should be noted but then ignored. Just look at them and then let them go, don't chase them or follow any line of reasoning. Go back to the counting. All thoughts have the same worth, nothing, when sitting. When sitting ... sit. Return to the counting. The same goes for any light displays, hallucinations, panic, fear or other illusions. Simply sitting ... sit.

Eventually, try to sit in seiza for about 30 minutes early in the morning and again at night. When starting the practice shorter times are advised until the legs are flexible and the circulation adjusts. If the legs begin to fall asleep, rise up off of the knees to allow circulation. Alternatively, roll up a blanket or something similar and place it between the lower legs to raise the hips up off of the heels. A small amount of pain is to be expected but don't make it a test of willpower to sit as long as possible.

Ideally the sitting should be done in a quiet room with soft illumination and few visual or other distractions. Music is inappropriate since the idea is not to be distracted rather than the other way 'round. Eventually the practice can be done anywhere with any amount of activity nearby.

When the sitting is finished or when the legs must be relieved, bend forward from the waist and place the forehead on the floor while keeping the hips on the heels. Place the hands palm upward on the floor beside the head. This symbolizes being open (and accepting) to anything that the world cares to offer. Breathing in this position for a short time before sitting up again will allow longer practice times.

There is a vast literature of self-help and meditation and there are many who are willing to teach secret methods of healing the soul for a price. All that is really necessary is a place to be alone and a few breaths. If some support is helpful then seiza can be done in a group but this is not necessary. Just sit ... simply sit.

Inazuma, Lightning

EMPTY CUP 6 Bugeisha Magazine. 1998

Sometimes an insight hits you like lightning, a blinding flash of knowledge that you feel is exactly right. I'm sure many of the readers know what I'm talking about. A sensei says "move that heel just a little bit further out" and bang, the whole body suddenly aligns and you feel a surge of power. Wow.

It's a marvellous feeling and it confirms, more than any rank test we could pass, that we are improving. It also proves what a wonderful teacher sensei really is, one quick look, a couple of words in your ear and look what he did. Yes, you've just experienced wisdom in action, what a budo-god. Oh if only it were true!

What really causes this sudden flash? Do we really improve in massive leaps when someone gives us a little nudge? Can sensei really glimpse us out of the corner of his eye and know exactly what we need?

I've got a wonderful student, so good in fact, that I have a hard time teaching her any more. I just can't see what needs to be done most of the time, she's too close to my skill level and what she needs is what I need, and if I knew what that was, I'd be a lot better than I am. Nevertheless there are times when I really have to bite my tongue. For instance, not so very long ago we got the video camera out and filmed ourselves. Later, over soda pops we watched.

At one point my student leaned over, slammed me in the arm and said "why didn't you tell me my head leans over to the side like that!"

Like I said, I had to bite my tongue, I've only been telling her that for three years. But that tape was an inazuma for her. A sudden flash of clarity, a feeling of "ah ha, that's what it is". She never tilts her head any more.

In fact, she might have fixed it a long time before if she hadn't developed a problem with her hearing when I talked about it, but that happens. You do develop blind spots with your sensei and after the twentieth time you hear the same thing, you start to tune it out. You have to be on constant guard to prevent that from happening.

The thing is, if you didn't have those blind spots, you wouldn't have those blinding flashes of understanding. Let me try to explain what I mean.

Your sensei, my sensei, just about any sensei out there who knows what he or she is doing, is constantly, from the very first lesson, telling us exactly what we need to know to do our art at least as well as they do it. They don't hold anything back and they don't change what they're saying from year to year. Think about it, in most cases they've got everything from raw beginners to ten-year veterans in the class, how could they be saying something different to you now, when they are also talking to the guy who just walked in off the street.

It isn't that sensei says anything different, he's just repeating what he got told. No, it's that you are hearing something different this time.

“When the student is ready, the teacher will appear”.

I don't have a clue where I read that but it struck me pretty hard when I did. What it used to mean to me was that if you want to do something, and you're willing to put a lot of effort into it, you'll eventually dig up someone who teaches it. Or if the budo-gods want you to learn, they'll cause a teacher to move to your town, and cause you to turn down that street and see the sign. Now I think it means, “when you're ready to learn, you'll hear what sensei has been droning on and on about for the last five years”. You'll finally “hear” it, he'll finally “say” it. You'll be at the stage of learning where “move from the hips” will mean something more than stick out your pelvis like Elvis. Bang! you get a lightning flash of insight about something that has been right there in front of you all the time.

Now if you'd actually been able to “hear” that, when it was first said, you'd never have had the flash. Of course we can't take in everything sensei says all at once, so in this case we're still going to “suddenly” understand things and in this sense, the inazuma is real, we do have to learn in spurts.

What of my repetition-deaf student? Could she have saved years of frustration by listening more closely? Perhaps, if she really was just tuning me out. In this case, one good way to prevent the delay in learning is for me to send her to another sensei for some instruction.

Everyone out there who teaches has experienced the “give me strength!” feeling that comes with watching some other instructor tell our student something we've told them a thousand times, and suddenly they get it. It's the fresh perspective, the new way of attacking an old problem that did the trick. That different accent on the voice suddenly cleared out the earwax and the student heard the correction.

We wouldn't have to ship the students out if they could come to class each day with the “mind of a beginner”, with shoshin, so that everything we say is heard as if for the very first time, but that's really hard to do.

So we've looked at two ways the “ah ha” feeling is produced, one a natural product of the way we teach and the way students learn, and one a result of students getting a bit stale.

I'm afraid there's a third way this can happen, and as an instructor it's hard for me to admit it, but it could be our fault. Take my student. If I say to her, for two years, “you're tilting your head” and let it go at that, it's small wonder that she starts to tune me out. I'm literally saying the same thing over and over which is sort of like the roar of the ventilation fan in the corner. It gets tuned out. I'm really not teaching her when I say that.

I should say, on the first day, is “you’re tilting your head”. On the second “move your head here”. On the third “keep your eyes still and fixed here when you make this move”. The fourth, stretch your neck upward at this point”. The fifth “drop your shoulders here”. The sixth, well you get the picture, you keep giving her the same correction over and over but frame it in a different way each time. All of them amount to “You’re tilting your head”, but you just can’t let it go at that if she doesn’t fix it herself. You’ve got to start coming up with positive ways to fix it. Sooner or later, you hope, she’ll fix it and then whatever you said to her that time will be her starting point on her students. If I say “line the nose up with the chin and the bellybutton” and she suddenly has that flash of understanding, the second thing she’ll say to her student who’s tilting his head is “line up your nose with your chin and your bellybutton”. (The first thing she’ll say is “you’re tilting your head”.)

When he doesn’t get it, she’ll start running at him from different angles, eventually she’ll send him to me and I’ll see what’s happening and won’t say a word. Then, if there’s any justice in the world, she’ll videotape him and he’ll see that blasted tilt and punch her in the arm and say “how come you never told me I tilt my head!.”

Well I can dream can’t I.

Riai and Bunkai: Meaning and Analysis

Bugeisha #7 1998
Empty Cup

"What's the meaning of Tennis!" said a good friend of mine one day while I was driving a van full of visiting sensei to their next appointment.

Iaido kata, like Karate kata are a series of physical motions strung together and taught with little or no explanation of what's going on. Sensei demonstrates and you do. It's simple and for a long time we can get away with parroting the actions. After all, the idea seems to be that we memorize which foot goes where, and when to cut or punch.

Several months or years later, we may get a strange feeling that there is something missing, and when we go looking we discover there is indeed something lacking in our performance. It's an understanding of what the movements mean. The riai of the kata is the underlying meaning, the explanation of just what is going on when we make this motion or that. Suddenly we are confronted, on several levels, with the discovery that there is an opponent or maybe several that have to be dealt with.

Now the kata starts to make sense. We move here because he's doing this, we look there because he's coming from that direction. We have to know what the opponent is doing so that we can perform the kata correctly. A great many students never get to this point, which is a pity, because here is where all the fun begins.

Once we get to the riai stage, we move on to bunkai, breaking down the kata and analyzing the parts. We move the sword in this manner because it has this function, we turn the wrist in that funny way here because it's a deflection along this line and a push on the elbow thus.

Then we take the various parts and practice them in isolation, doing each element over and over again until we grasp it's essence, and burn it into the muscles. Suddenly all the basic practice we've done for ages begins to take on new life, we may find that we're looking forward to doing a hundred or two hundred reps of something very simple like an overhead cut or a forward punch.

After all that, we start building the kata all over again, putting the pieces together and examining how they fit. Only this time it's different. With the new understanding we have of what's happening, and how to perform each piece correctly, we suddenly demonstrate a whole different level of skill. Take a look at a beginner performing a simple kata. See how the eyes are unfocused, the head fixed in line with the shoulders. See how the movements are all generated internally, there's no reference to anything happening outside.

Now take a look at someone who "knows what they're doing". See how the eyes lead the head and the head leads the body. See how the eyes actually focus on the invisible enemies. See how the body lines up behind each technique and the power is directed to a specific place. See how it looks as if there is more than a machine going through the movements.

My sensei often warns us against doing a "sword dance". Since we follow a modern dance group onto

the floor for several of our classes, I've begun looking at the dancers a bit more carefully. Some are good and some are just "going through the motions". The difference? The good ones are beyond the memorization step, they're also beyond the internal gaze, the contemplation of their belly-buttons that causes the glazed eyes and fixed smiles as they count off 1-2-3 and step here or there. The good ones are interacting with the other dancers, the music, and their own riai, their interpretation of what the dance means. For them it's obvious dance means more than "hey, this is a cool move let's put it in here".

My sensei also calls it "selfish iaido" this gazing at nothing and working at good splashy movements with no thought at all to the meaning of the kata.

I've seen whole organizations of iai, full of students who might as well be mechanical dolls. You can actually hear them counting in their heads as they go from one segment of the kata to another, all in the same time, no variations, no thought whatsoever except what the move after this one is. The really sad part is that nobody has ever told them there was a problem. They all assume that one memorizes this kata and then the next and then the next. You perform the kata without making a mistake and you get the next grade. Then you learn some more kata. I guess the idea is whoever dies with the most kata memorized wins.

I must confess I was a "collector" for years, at one point I believe I knew almost 200 different kata or styles of doing kata. I could do them and teach them but I did not "own" them any more than a parrot owns the sentences they squawk.

So we must discover the meaning of the kata, and we must break it down and analyse it in order to move to the next level of skill. Once we do that we can never practice like a robot again, the kata becomes a living thing and we start to feel a genuine delight in what was once repetitive and dull. At this point in my training I also began to lose kata. Those for which I had no idea about the riai, I simply stopped practising. Why should anyone go through empty motions when it is so much more rewarding to practice fully with a knowledge of the deeper meanings.

But there is a small problem that now shows it's weird little head. We start to think that everything has a meaning. Riai becomes an obsession. This is where my friend's comment showed up. "What's the meaning of Tennis!" I had been grilling him for a couple of hours on the meaning of this or that term when we came to one of the kata in our sword school named "Shinobu" I've never been able to get that name translated so naturally I asked him. He conferred with the sensei for several minutes, looked puzzled, conferred some more, then with a look of irritation turned to me and let loose with "What's the meaning of Tennis!" I nearly fell off the seat laughing.

It's been a rallying cry for me ever since. I'm sure it was a word with a specific meaning at one point but I don't know it, and I really don't care what it is. "Tennis" is a game you play with rackets and a ball, the word doesn't have to mean anything beyond that. Just like Shinobu doesn't have to mean anything beyond "a kata where you go after someone in a very dark room".

From complete ignorance about the meanings of the kata, to an obsession with the meaning of every little nuance, I had been pulled back to some sort of balance. What a relief, and what a feeling of freedom I had at that moment. Not everything has to mean something all the time.

At one point in many iai kata (in some schools), the student switches his feet. For instance, after

standing from a kneeling position (left knee down, right knee up) to a right foot forward stance, the left foot is brought forward, and the right foot moved back. This is done at the end of the kata when the opponent lies dead or dying on the floor. This motion is the source of endless speculation amongst the iaido crowd since nobody I've ever talked to seems to have a clue as to the meaning of this switch. Maybe it is to check and see if he's really still alive? (What? are you that short sighted?) Maybe it's a motion to let the sword be put away more easily? (But in one case the left foot is forward, in the other the right, so why switch them at all?) Maybe it's to unlock the legs which have been stiffened by the adrenaline rush of a life and death encounter? Who knows?

All I know is that I no longer really worry too much about it. Someday I may find out, someday someone may come up with a really good explanation, but for now I simply switch my feet because that's what's done at that point.

Tennis may once have had a meaning beyond a sound representing a game. It may once have been more than an auditory shortcut for "that game where you use a racquet to hit a ball over a low net while wearing ugly short pants" but now it seems to have lost that meaning. That's the natural ebb and flow of words in the language.

Physical actions in kata can also go through a natural ebb and flow. For decades and perhaps centuries kata have been taught physically, visually, and verbally, without reference to fixed media like books or films. During this passage from teacher to student down to us, many movements would naturally take on a new form and even a new meaning. Language can change, and so can physical action, especially when it's present in a kata.

The distinct foot switch, from one foot back and one forward to feet together to the other foot back, may, just may, be a modern derivative from the older schools where that particular motion does not exist. Instead, the movement comes at a point where the swordsman stands up from the kneeling position, and brings the feet together all at once, and then steps back with the other leg. Stepping up and forward could be in preparation for another step forward if necessary. Stepping back would be a natural movement in preparation for putting the sword away. Why the switch? Perhaps to keep the hips more balanced and ready to move in any direction, rather than just swinging a foot forward and back again like a pendulum.

But really "What's the meaning of Tennis!" If you don't know why you do it, take it on faith and do it anyway.

Of course you might have a real obsession with riai and demand an explanation; use my argument for change to justify giving it your own meaning. I suppose I couldn't really say much about that, since it might actually improve your iai. But please, please, don't decide that you can change the kata itself so that it makes sense. That would be like suddenly deciding that "tennis" meant the colour you get when you mix teal with magenta.

Might make a nice colour for some ugly short pants but really now, "What's the meaning of Tennis!"

Seiyoku: Self Control, Control of passions

Empty Cup 1998
Bugeisha #8

I'm sure you've all worked with this guy at one time or another, so you'll recognize him. He's the guy that seems to go out of his way to be annoying, in any way he can. He's the guy who can't seem to figure out how to do his job, but insists on telling you how to do yours. The guy who seems to be in the way more than he's helping.

Well I work with him too, and I guess I should thank him, even if it hurts to do it. It was through old Gloomy Gus that I managed another of my all too few insights into this martial arts thing we all do.

For a lot of years now I've been wondering just why anyone would spend a lifetime practising how to beat people up. It can't be for self defence, I've been injured far more by training than I have ever been by attacks on the street. Who would spend ten years studying on the off chance of getting into a bar fight anyway? No there's got to be more to it than what sits there on the surface for us to look at.

I first began practising Aikido in 1980 because I couldn't find a Zen temple in the neighbourhood. I figured that the martial arts would do just as well. Dunno if that was a legitimate reason to practice, since I can't say that I've been enlightened, and it's been almost 2 decades so far. So much for "sudden realization".

To meet girls? Sure, I really want to meet a girl who can twist my arm off if I offend her. Besides, what girls? I do iaido and we've got about 5% women I'd estimate, maximum. Not that I'm complaining mind you, it is nice to have somewhere to go besides the garage when I want some room to think, but I don't want the magazine flooded with complaints so please ignore that last statement. No, I don't practice martial arts to meet girls.

Glamour? Yeah, right, like dressing up in skirts and swinging sticks is glamorous. I will admit to a certain amount of fantasizing though, I watched pirate movies like everyone else when I was growing up and there really is something inherently appealing about swinging a sword. But that grew kind of stale quite a few years ago, and I must admit I no longer have a lot of time for kids who want to "really learn how to use a sword on the battlefield".

In my continuing search for why I spend so much of my time "playing at swords" I went to the academic literature and discovered that practising the martial arts (at least the traditional arts) can reduce aggression. Since I'm a bit beyond the juvenile delinquent age I wasn't too interested in this aspect of things but I did file it away to think about.

Then comes Gloomy Gus and his irritating, in the way and in your face, lifestyle. After a couple of years in close contact, my patience had been stretched pretty much to the limit. Finally, one day I realized that he was being deliberately contrary and stupid for the specific purpose of annoying the hell out of me.

The urge to break his arm was all but overwhelming, but just as fast I stopped the urge, closed my mouth and walked out of the room. I swallowed my anger and didn't let him see just how far he had pushed me. Later I went to the dojo and worked it out of my system.

Years and years of broken noses, fingers, and toes, of bruises, sprains and twists, and the effort that it took not to lose my temper and lash out blindly, had finally paid off in "real life". I saved my job, and quite possibly my freedom and family by not doing what I've trained so long to do, on this idiot. You can be sure he would have pressed assault charges, and would have had absolutely no idea why I had attacked him "without provocation".

You see, you can win "the fight" and lose the war in the blink of an eye. When it comes to the martial arts, the key is not the training that allows you to punch someone out, it's the training that allows you to not punch someone out. It's all about self control.

I should have twigged on this a long time ago but the control you develop in the martial arts is subtle, and a little slow to manifest itself (at least with me it was). Thinking back I realize that I stopped having a problem with drinking some time after I began practising. One day I simply said "no thanks" to that next bottle of beer, and the hangovers have been missing now for a long time. I thought it was because I got older and smarter, but I wonder now.

About six years ago I ended up in hospital with atrial fibrillation, a condition where the heart beats rapidly and improperly. After a few hours and several shots of digoxin, it kicked back into a normal beat. After another couple of weeks the specialist told me he had no idea what the problem was, but he's seen it before in big strong guys who lift a lot of weights and drink a lot of coffee. I said I'd stop drinking my 7 or 8 cups a day and switch to decaf instead. The doctor thought that cutting down would be a bit easier, but I just stopped taking in caffeine. Four days of a massive coffee hangover later I was over it, and haven't drunk more than 8 or 10 cups of caffeinated coffee since.

Habits may be the ultimate test of self control. Can you break a habit immediately, without "tailing off" or "falling off the wagon" for months or years? If you've trained for two decades with the idea that you change a physical movement, or a mental concept the instant that sensei tells you to, then letting go of the coffee habit seems rather simple. If you've gone to the dojo for the last 15 years without giving in to the temptation to do something else "more important" or to "give my poor old body a break" when you are injured, a coffee hangover doesn't seem too much to bear.

Seiyoku, self control. Go to class no matter what. Do it by choice not out of boredom or habit. Do what sensei tells you to do, don't think about it, don't take a few weeks to work on it, just do it now, change the habit and stop using the excuse that you "learn slowly". Push yourself and then keep control when you go over the edge and start to lose it.

Do all this and maybe one day you too can not punch someone in the nose when they richly deserve it.

8 WAYS YOU ALREADY KNOW TO REDUCE STRESS INSTANTLY

Martial Arts Free Press
1998

Got a grading coming up, or a big presentation at work? Feeling a little stressed? You probably know how to reduce that stress! Read on and see how many of these handy tips you already know but never remember to use.

BELLY BREATHING

Here's the number one secret technique to reduce jitters on the luncheon lecture circuit. Let your belly expand as you breath. In fact, put your hand over your abdomen and push against it as you breath in. Now let the abdomen fall as you breath out. It's the same breathing method you use for training.

At the lectern, move up to the table and breath against that.

NOSE AND MOUTH BREATHING

In through the nose and out through the mouth. This is how we're designed, the nose filtering and warming the air, then expelling the waste fully out the mouth.

Breathing in through the mouth tells your body that you are running or otherwise under stress. Breathing out through the nose makes for a more restricted expulsion which creates a bit of stress in the chest.

BALANCE

If you're off balance physically, you 'll feel off balance mentally. Centre yourself between the "box", make sure your centre of balance and mass is positioned in the centre of the rectangle formed by your toes and heels, or if you're sitting down, between the contact points with the ground.

Recovering your physical balance helps recover your mental balance.

SYMMETRICAL POSTURE

This helps pull your centre of balance into the centre of your body. If you have one arm or leg stuck out to the side it pulls the balance point out that way. This creates a feeling of being "off centre" in the mind. When sitting put both feet on the ground. When standing drop both arms down to the sides, don't put one fist on the hip and one in a pocket.

OPEN CHEST AND BODY

A tight chest and hunched position signals the brain that you just got kicked in the stomach. Open the chest so you can breathe more easily. Straighten the back and correct the posture so that you can find your balance point more easily.

ALIGNED SPINE

Think of the spine as a pile of bricks tied up with strings. If you lean it to one side or the other the strings have to do a lot of work to keep it from falling apart. Same with your back muscles, if you slouch to one side or hunch over the muscles have to work overtime trying to keep your head from falling to the floor. Straighten up and let the natural S-curve of the spine work properly. In this position it's like a big spring.

MAKE YOUR HEAD LIGHT

Put the head squarely atop the pile of bricks, ears aligned with the shoulders. Now stretch the back of the neck so the face lines up in the same plane as the chest. This creates a sense of lightness in the head, as if it's being pulled upward.

The muscles that have been fighting to keep the spine and head off the ground can now come out of strain. Less muscle strain, less tension in the mind.

DROP THE SHOULDERS

When you expect to get punched you instinctively pull your shoulders up to protect the head and neck. If you relax the shoulders and let them drop back to their proper position the mind relaxes too.

DON'T FIGHT GRAVITY

Your body posture should always be relaxed, aligned, and in good contact with the ground. Don't fight universal forces, work with them. It's a lot less stressful.

SQUEEZE AND LET GO

If you still have some muscles that feel tight, squeeze them as hard as you can for three or four seconds, then let them go, relax totally.

There you have it, 8 ways to reduce stress instantly, and you probably knew them all!

10 WAYS TO STRONGER FOREARMS

Martial Arts Free Press
1998

Everyone can use a stronger grip, whether you practice weapons, grappling or kick/punch arts. Here's a quick set of exercises you can do at home watching TV or talking on the phone. While you're at it, why not do them from a nice deep horse stance to give the legs a workout too. You should start all these exercises in sets of 10 to 20 and work up as you get used to them.

A. WARMUP STRETCHING

1. Stretch your arm straight out in front of your shoulders. Turn your palm up and use the other hand to bend it down toward the ground. Now turn the palm down and bend the fingers up toward the sky. Just for good measure do the same stretches with the palm facing right and left.
2. Now push down on the back of your hand (you can keep the arm straight or let the elbow bend, try both) as you try to touch your wrist with the thumb of the stretched hand. Don't cheat and touch the wrist with your other thumb. Do these exercises up, down, right and left.
3. Finish off by bending each finger and thumb back one at a time.

Now your hands and arms should be good and tingly, it's time to start working.

B. WRIST ROLLS AND WAVES

4. Stretch your arm straight in front of your shoulders again. Open your hand and roll it around clockwise, then counterclockwise. Try to make the biggest circle you can with your fingertips.
5. Close the hand into a fist and roll it around the same way.
6. Now wave the hands back and forth and up and down in the same motion you used when doing the stretches. Really strain to get the maximum motion possible.
7. Grab a couple of soup cans and do the rolls and waves again.

C. FIST MAKING

Here's the hard part, are you ready?

8. Stretch the arms as far forward as possible in front of the shoulders. Now bend the wrists so your palms are facing forward (fingers up) like you're trying to stop a car or runaway elephant. Starting with the little finger first, tighten each finger in turn and then fold the thumb over in a fist. Squeeze the fist shut. Open the hands and repeat.

9. Now do another set of the same exercise but this time open the hands as much as possible , spread the fingers wide and "squeeze them open" before squeezing them shut again.

10. For the last exercise do sets of 50. Open and close the hands as fast as you can while counting out loud.

D. WRIST SHAKING AND WARMDOWN STRETCH

When you're done the workout, stretch like you did to warm up and finish by relaxing the hands and shaking them down by your sides, at shoulder height and finally, above your head.

Keep this up and you'll have forearms like Popeye in no time at all!

EIGHT STEPS TO GOOD SWORD CARE

Martial Arts Free Press
1998

So you've got yourself a sword. If it's a real one you might have spent as much as a new small car, an aluminum replica might cost as much as that washer and dryer your significant other has been asking for. It would be nice to keep it in good shape (or at least better shape than the relationship). We'll discuss the after-practice steps to good sword health for both these beasties. This guide is for the working sword, one you use for regular practice, and not an antique, collectible or "wall hanger".

First, it should be mentioned that in no case is it safe to use a blade with 50 year old fittings, wood does not last that long without drying and cracking. Your blade and your fittings should be new, and made with practice in mind.

For a working sword, after every practice.

1. Inspect the saya (scabbard) for cracks. Check the fit of the blade in the koiguchi (scabbard mouth), note any repairs that should be made before your next practice. Make special note of any repairs that must be made before you use the blade again. Don't forget to make them, a scabbard that breaks apart in your belt may do more than just cut through your belt and drop your skirt in front of the class.
2. Check the handle for loose tsuka maki (cord wrapping) or any movement in the tsuba (guard), or the seppa (washers on either side of the guard). Check the fuchi gane and tsuka gashira (the metal fittings on either end of the handle). If the wrap is loose, decide if you can repair it with a bit of glue or whether you need to send it away to be wrapped again. While you're at it twist the tsuka (handle) a bit to make sure it isn't cracked. If it is, put it away until you get a new one made. Never work with a damaged handle, it isn't worth the risk.
3. Turn the edge up, tip facing away from yourself. Grab the saya with your left hand, and the tsuka with your right. Pull the blade out of the saya with a steady hand, let the mune (back of the blade) ride on the inside of the saya.
4. Set the saya down beside you and then inspect the sword blade. Look for chips, cracks and blemishes. Sight down the back to make sure you haven't bent it during practice. Any damage to the blade should be considered and appropriate steps taken. If it's cracked, it likely should be retired but a small chip won't be too much trouble. Major bends can be straightened over your knee with care. Small wobbles shouldn't be too much trouble. (I did say we were talking about working swords and not collectors items didn't I?)

5. Take a clean dry paper cloth and wipe the old oil and sweat off the blade. Start from the habaki (the wedge that fits into the saya) and wipe up and off the tip. Make sure you're pinching over the back of the blade and not over the edge or you'll cut the cloth and then your hand. Wipe several times to remove the oil and resist the temptation to "scrub" especially near the tip or you might slip off and come back down to pierce your hand.

6. If you use the sword regularly, or if it is an aluminum blade you can now simply wipe on a fresh coat of oil. See step 7. The oil should be a light "paraffin oil" (a mineral oil) which is free of such things as rust inhibitors. Avoid commercial gun oils or machinery oils. If you want to spend the money, you can get "clove oil" from a specialty supplier. This oil contains a bit of clove oil for that authentic sword scent. Do not go to the pharmacy and grab medicinal clove oil, it's not what you use on swords, save it for your next toothache.

7. Do not perform this step if you are using an aluminum blade. Regularly, and whenever you will be putting the blade away for more than a few days, you should wipe it with uchiko powder. This powder is, in fact, carefully screened abrasive stone which has been worn off during the polishing process. For this step, clean off the old oil carefully with a cloth, then with your powder ball, tap lightly over the whole surface of the blade. Try to keep the powder and anything else out of the handle fittings. Take another clean cloth and wipe from habaki to tip several times, using the powder to pick up old oil and to abrade any light surface rust away. Be careful to use a good grade of uchiko powder since any large pieces of grit will scratch your blade during this step. There is no grade of sandpaper that is suitable to this step! After you finish with the uchiko, apply oil as in step six above.

If you have an aluminum blade, it may have been chromed. If you use uchiko powder on it you'll eventually wear away the chrome.

8. Replace the blade in the saya and put it into its protective bag ready for the next practice.

So, eight steps to good sword care, perform them regularly and your sword will be with you a long long time. Too bad there aren't eight simple steps to getting that relationship back on track.

DOJO DISCIPLINE AND ETIQUETTE

Bugeisha #9

1998

Empty Cup Column

I've always found that self discipline and etiquette in the martial arts were quite closely interlinked. You really can't have one without the other.

A visitor was at our dojo recently and commented that he was a bit concerned about the proper etiquette and discipline before he came. Afterward he commented that the class was a bit "informal".

He was being kind, my classes are a disaster, I don't care if people come in late, miss classes, talk during class, wear wild coloured uniforms or none at all. In fact I've been guilty of showing up for practice in a hakama and a T-shirt on really hot summer days, and then there's my old Aikido gi top with the sleeves ripped off at the shoulders. My students sometimes pay for the classes, but as often as not simply forget. I sometimes write it down if they've paid. As to talking in class, I'm especially prone to running off on a tangent and discussing some arcane point of history or philosophy for half the class.

It's all pretty relaxed, and I like it that way. I teach adults. Actually I teach adults who want to be in the class. In fact, I teach adults who often get a bit annoyed at my slack teaching style, but I simply can't be bothered nagging people to get to class when they feel a bit slack, or pumping them up if they're tired, or providing them with a smack on the back of the head if their attention wanders. They're not children and we're not related, and I'm certainly not going to be there for them when they need that kind of hand-holding in their outside lives. Our classes are often like life, distracting and annoying.

It's all a plot of course. I want the students in my class to be able to discipline themselves, to get to class with no help from me even when they don't want to come, just because they know it's good for them. To pull it together in class when they have to. To focus on a moment's notice when the situation demands it. It's easy to meditate in a monastery, try it on a city street.

It doesn't matter to me if the students want to talk about the variations in a specific kata during this period of history or that, I'll chatter on for quite a while about it. In fact I leave it up to them to get me back on track so we can all practice. Since I'm facing the clock I know better than they do how much time I'm wasting. I don't forget about swinging the sword, but I insist they don't forget either. It's my job to get them to the point where they no longer need me around, not make them look at me as some sort of strange dressing parental figure.

Does that mean I have students whose techniques are sloppy, unfocused and incorrect? I certainly hope not! I demand complete discipline within the kata, in their handling of the sword, and in their dealings with each other during partner practice. I also demand that they know exactly what their sword is doing (and what they're doing with it) at every moment during the class. This stuff matters. Addressing me as "sensei" or "sir" and bowing at me is irrelevant. Coming late for class just means you miss some practice. It certainly doesn't disrupt the class, at least not in our dojo with all that chattering and clattering.

It's tough in my class, despite the appearance and the smiling fool up front. Students have to go from sharing a joke to fighting for their lives in an instant. No preparation time, no carefully arranged space, no time to gather their concentration. I call the technique, they get ready, I make some idiotic comment that breaks their concentration and then I tell them to start the technique. They deal with it. Just like they might have to deal with traffic on the way home. Life rarely allows you time to prepare, it just hits you with a truck.

The meaning of iai is, after all, to be prepared at any time, in any situation, to blend and adapt. Tsune ni itte kyu ni awasu, or I Ai for short. I require my class to shift mood and attention, to concentrate and relax rapidly in order to develop the ability to focus when necessary, and not die of stress induced heart attacks the rest of the time.

I don't suppose a visitor to the dojo would see any of that, it likely looks like a rather sloppily run class with an instructor who isn't paying attention. So what do I notice, if anything? Well for my most recent visitor I noticed a watch that shouldn't have been on his wrist, mishandling in the sword, inattention at critical moments, an incorrect uniform, and many other things. I didn't comment on these, and they aren't in a "bad" file anywhere in my head. If he becomes a student of mine I'll correct them eventually but for now he's just checking the place out. He did pretty well actually, he watched, copied, and refrained from comment either on the techniques and how they were performed, or on my strange ideas about discipline and etiquette.

What of my students when they visit other dojo? They do fine, most of them have had extensive martial arts experience anyway, and fall back on old habits. The others have usually developed the ability to pay attention, and they watch other students, get their cues from them, and act accordingly. I do the same since, even if I am a "sensei" who teaches at my own dojo, my etiquette, and my discipline as I've been taught them is likely not applicable to someone else's dojo. "When in Rome..." It's far more important to visit a dojo with common politeness than it is to fit into the specific etiquette. Shut up, watch, listen, don't act as you do in your own dojo if you notice that these guys don't do it your way. Even if you think they're wrong it's impolite to say so.

And get to every class, even when you don't feel like practising. That too is polite.

ARE YOU IN A MARTIAL ARTS CULT? HOW TO KNOW FOR SURE.

Martial Arts Free Press, 1999

As with any learning experience, in the martial arts you have to trust the teacher to know what's best for you. If he tells you to jump, you shouldn't say "how high?" you should just jump as high as you can. If she tells you to breathe in when you do this, and breathe out when you do that, don't waste your breath asking why, just do it. That surrender of some of your natural doubt and reluctance to do anything new is necessary to your improvement in the art.

But what about those requests and demands that go beyond what's needed for improvement? How do we know we've crossed the line and are now behaving as if we've joined the Solar Temple or Jim Jones for a trip down to South America? When do we know that what we're being asked to do is no longer guidance, but abuse?

Most people know the limits when they're at work listening to the boss, or when they're at school learning mathematics, but it seems that once some people get into the dojo, common sense is left at the door with the shoes. Perhaps it's because the seniors seem able to do such miraculous things. Perhaps it's all those old kung fu movies on TV that say you have to surrender completely to the wizened old master. Whatever it is, students of the martial arts seem overly likely to surrender their free will to anyone with a wall full of framed calligraphy.

Well hang on, with the help of some friends I've compiled a handy-dandy list that will let you know if you're in a martial arts cult. Check out the following helpful hints and take a good look at your own dojo. Remember always that martial arts instructors aren't regulated, anybody can rent a space and hang up a sign, it's up to you to decide who's real, who's fake and who's a dangerous control freak out to satisfy a giant need for attention and money.

YOU KNOW YOU'RE IN A MARTIAL ARTS CULT:

WHEN YOU WALK IN THE DOOR AND:

The security cameras point in toward the dojo, not at the doors.

You can't actually talk to sensei, but have to go through the senior students.

The picture of the soke (the headmaster of the style) on the wall is the instructor's picture, and he's 23 years old.

Everyone in the dojo looks the same, white hair, red eyes, stiff little fingers...

The system is called Vulcan-ryu

Your instructor has the class bow to the kamiza and there is a picture of Yoda up there and then the class starts training with plastic Star Wars Lightsabers

There are assault rifles on the weapons rack.

The instructor tells you he's the messiah, and can produce documentary evidence to support his claim.

WHEN YOU READ THE CONTRACT AND:

It ends on Dec 31 1999 at midnight, stipulating you have to be with the rest of the dojo in a remote field at that time.

It includes a clause that allows "Midnight Reflex Tests".... Which doesn't mean a lot, until three weeks after joining, at 23:59, a bunch of ninja break into your house.

You are required to have the club's badge tattooed on your body.

The initiation ceremony involves rolling up a gi leg, wearing a bag on your head and the recitation of painfully bad haiku penned by the instructor

Sensei insists that branding the address of your dojo on your forehead is a long established tradition and courtesy to all of your opponents foolish enough to stand in the way of your master's domination of the world.

You notice in the fine print, which you can hardly read, there's some reference to your wife and any daughters you might have.

The instructor hands you a sharp knife and indicates your little finger when you're late with your club dues.

WHEN YOU FINALLY NOTICE:

You never actually get to practice with the sensei.

And you still can't talk to sensei, but have to go through the senior students.

The instructor drives up in a stretch limo but the showers are broken and you wash up in cold water before walking home in the snow because you sold your car to pay for the lessons.

The senior students tell you what to get sensei for his birthday, which seems to come three or four times a year.

Your instructor keeps telling you that there is a spaceship waiting for you behind the Hale-Bopp comet.

Your instructor passes around a donation basket midway through class and/or asks that you turn over your banks accounts to the dojo.

Your instructor refers to his students as his "Flock".

Your instructor has the advanced students digging a bomb shelter.

The instructor requests all students to 'shave' their heads (or other body parts) as a symbol of their devotion to the art.

You're a member of a national organization whose sole purpose is to trash talk other national organizations that practice similar arts.

Your instructors keep talking about "effective street fighting techniques" during your classical weapons training.

Sensei keeps pointing to the generic ninjas of Mortal Kombat-esque films saying "you've got it right when you look like that!" and his favorite quote is "Your soul is mine!"

Your Kiai shout is actually a modified Multi-level marketing pitch

Sensei keeps saying: "Those foolish Illuminati! I'll show them with my invincible legion!"

The sounds coming from sensei's mouth do not match his mouth movements.... he's dubbed!

YOU NOTICE YOURSELF:

Shout "osu" at everyone at work, including the boss.

Bow every time you go into a shop.

Sleeping with your eyes held back with Scotch tape.

Standing on the sidewalk outside the dojo selling flowers to passer's by.

Building sensei's "private dojo" behind his house, and it looks a lot like a hot tub. Which wouldn't be so bad except only the women in class ever seem to get invited to the high level training sessions.

TESTS FOR PROMOTION:

Include sneaking in to assassinate a government figure.

Above 1st Dan are "Fight to the Death"

Include getting sent against British Secret Agents en masse

Did you agree with 10 or more of these clues? If so you might just be in a martial arts cult. Quickly now, get yourself to the nearest telephone and call me. You can join my organization "I'm not a cult member" for low yearly payments and I promise you'll be one of the select 144,444 next January 1.

JAPANESE SWORD TRAINING IN THE WEST

Sword Forum Magazine, 1999

So you want to be a modern samurai? Well the primary weapon of the samurai (at least during the Tokugawa era from about 1603 to 1868) was the sword, so it would be wise to start your journey of transformation by studying the sword. In the West we have several choices for training with the Katana. I'll outline them and try to provide a bit of background concerning the practice and its connection to the samurai.

It is often supposed that the Japanese sword arts of today are directly linked to the arts of the Sengoku Jidai, the age of wars that predated the Tokugawa peace. While it is true that some of the schools I will describe claim an unbroken lineal descent from that time to this, it is doubtful what we study today is what was practised on those long ago battlefields. By the very fact of being "living arts" the Japanese sword schools have changed with their times. The arts as practised today are designed and intended to be practised by the people of today, not the samurai of half a millennium ago. Each headmaster of the art was and is a product of his time, he lived (or lives) within his or her society, as do the students of the art. With each generation the art changes, old skills are dropped and new skills developed to reflect the needs of the time.

Add to that the relative lack of detailed technical writing about the schools (often what was written was barely more than a listing of techniques) and you are left with the almost inescapable conclusion that what we practice today is barely linked to what the Samurai in the wars practised.

But don't despair, the techniques may have been changed, tarted up, beautified, or what have you, but the methods of practice remain, as do the benefits of that practice.

THE ARTS IN THE WEST

First a bit of a disclaimer. I will attempt to give this listing in order of the relative likelihood of finding instruction. The arts with the largest number of instructors will be listed first, those which you are unlikely to find without a lot of luck, later. This is, however, not a statistically accurate ranking. I may get it wrong. I may also have some specific information a bit muddled, this is, after all a survey article, not a history book so I won't be citing sources and defending my thesis before a panel. Take it with a grain of salt and do your own investigation if you get interested. The internet is a great place to start, there are newsgroups, mailing lists, and thousands of websites devoted to the Japanese sword.

I'll also try not to pass judgment on any of the arts I will describe, but I will try to give the reader an accurate (again, as I perceive it) idea of where the arts came from, and what they teach. I fully expect to be blasted for this attempt, so please take note of my email address and don't go blasting those who don't deserve it.

AIKIDO

There are several different flavours of Aikido, Aiki-jutsu, and Daito-ryu in the west, and the total number of students would be quite impressive I'm sure. A large number of these schools include some form of sword training in their practice. I'm most familiar with the Aikikai, the direct line schools founded by Morihei Ueshiba and continued by the late Kisshomoru Ueshiba so I'll start there.

The particular sword arts studied by Morihei Ueshiba are somewhat unclear, at least as far as what, exactly, he learned, and for how long. Before he met Sokaku Takeda of the Daito-ryu, Ueshiba studied a couple of ju-jutsu schools and the Yagyū Shingan-ryu, a classical style that still includes practice (or at least demonstrations) in full battle armour.

Sokaku Takeda, founder of Daito-ryu Aiki-jutsu (OK we can debate the founder label another time) studied the Itto-ryu, a sword style we'll mention again in relation to Kendo. I suspect Ueshiba was deeply influenced by this style through Takeda.

Later, as Aikido was established, there was contact with the Kashima Shinto-ryu school, and this influence can be seen most clearly in the sword matching kata preserved by Morihiro Saito and his "Iwama-style" Aikido. By all accounts, however, the Aikido of Ueshiba's later years, and through the years his son led the Aikikai, the sword was not practised much. The result of this was that many of the senior Aikido instructors practice a rather idiosyncratic style of sword. The same can be said of course, about the other major Aikido styles such as Tomiki and Yoshinkan whose founders had varying amounts of sword experience under Ueshiba and the other visitors to the dojo, or in other places.

Most of these senior instructors will readily admit to a lack of formal instruction in the sword, and to practising a sword style that "is in accord with the principles of Aikido". This means that the sword you practice in Aikido may have a tenuous connection with the classical arts. Remember though, as I said above, the classical arts may themselves have a rather tenuous connection to the past.

There are groups within the Aikikai (and other organizations) who also studied sword arts outside their Aikido practice. In particular I am thinking of those in Europe and the USA who practised Muso Shinden-ryu Iaido with Takeshi Mitsuzuka. This iai practice is well integrated with the Aikido practice in many dojo. Although this is likely the largest "group" of Aikido instructors practising a particular line of iaido, many other instructors practice this art, and other classical arts to gain insight into the sword, and hopefully, into their own Aikido practice.

The "Aikijutsu" schools of various shapes in the West, are even more fragmented than the Aikido schools, and I won't attempt to classify them or the sword arts offered, but I suspect the main points made about Aikido will be accurate for those "jutsu" derived from Aikido. Those "Aikijutsu" which are derived from Daito-ryu will be influenced by the sword of that art. Which is to say, not much exposed to the sword at all. As was the case with Aikido, Sokaku Takeda in his later days, and his son Tokimune, did not practice the sword much, concentrating on the unarmed aspects of the art. There are, however, some lines of the art in which Itto-ryu is practised.

So, the most likely place for the typical "samurai to be" off the street to encounter the Japanese sword is in the Aiki based arts. The sword found in these schools does, for the most part, have a real basis in the "classical" art, which means the grip, stance and swing will be within the range of what was taught during the Tokugawa era. But I doubt you will find a classical style that will match what you learn.

A brief explanation of why the sword was dropped from these arts: World War II and the aftermath, where all forms of “classical” martial arts were, to say the least, out of favour.

The Aikido sword is usually a “bokken” a carved, wooden replica of the katana. In Aikido the sword is usually without a guard. Practice is most often done solo, and with a partner in simple repetitive patterned strikes and blocks. Sometimes you will find kata, or more complex patterns of attack, defence and footwork. Those schools which practice iaido mostly do so in the way described below for that art.

KENDO

After an Aikido dojo, I suspect the next most likely find will be the Kendo dojo. Kendo is a “modern” art (of about 200-300 years) which involves a “freestyle” form of practice involving body armour and a replica sword made of four staves of bamboo. The main root art of Kendo is Itto-ryu, which is one of the major streams of sword practice. Kendo was developed from the various classical styles by instructors who wanted to go further than the patterned practice with wooden swords.

This art is much easier to describe than Aikido since it is a single, unified, world-wide art. By far and away, the majority of people who practice Kendo in the world do so under a single national body which in turn belongs to the International Kendo Federation. The IKF holds a world championship each three years, the next being in the United States. Any kendoka in the world can walk into a club anywhere else in the world and feel at home practising.

Kendo also includes a set of ten kata which are practised with wooden long and short swords and without armour. These are called (ready?) the Kendo kata, and are based on the old sword schools. The kata are named “one” through “ten” which kind of reflects the sort of art Kendo is. Direct, to the point, and no frills.

The Kendo Federation also oversees two other sections of practice, Iaido and Jodo. There is a set of 10 Iaido kata and 12 Jodo kata which were developed by the Federation for practice, demonstration and grading purposes. The Iaido kata were derived from several schools but mostly from Muso Jikiden Eishin-ryu and Muso Shinden-ryu. The jodo kata were derived exclusively from the Shindo Muso-ryu. There are large numbers of Iaido clubs in the West which are affiliated with the Kendo Federations. In Europe there are also many Jodo clubs which are affiliated with the national Kendo Federations, but in the Americas this is not the case at the moment.

IAIDO

OK let’s get a bit more complex again. There is a Kendo Federation which includes Iaido clubs, these do the Kendo Iaido kata. If they are mostly a Kendo club this may be all they do but most of these dojo also practice an iaido koryu, an old school style. The Iaido section was added to the Kendo Federation in the late 60s. Prior to that in Japan the All Japan Iaido Federation was founded by the then headmaster of the Muso Jikiden Eishin-ryu. The AJIF (or ZNIR in Japanese acronym language) has a set of 5 common kata for grading, practice and demonstration, and all the schools in this organization also practice a koryu.

Those are the two major “organizations” you will find in the West. You will also find a significant number of “independents” and even some other organizations of some size, such as the San Shin Kai (which is the Aikido-based organization of Takeshi Mitsuzuka in North America).

Iaido is practised alone, using a metal blade to perform set kata involving a draw and cut, a finishing cut or cuts, a symbolic cleaning of the blade, and a replacement of the blade back into the scabbard. Many Iaido schools also have partner practice kata done with wooden swords (in this case usually called “bokuto” rather than “bokken”, same thing) in specific patterns, and without armour.

In the wars preceding the Tokugawa era, the sword was a secondary weapon, especially toward the end when the gun became decisive on the battlefield. In those days training in the sword would have been rudimentary at best, and iai would have been of marginal use. With the Tokugawa, era the sword became a symbol of the Samurai class, and was worn commonly. Combine the availability of the weapon with the move of the Samurai into the towns and you now have the atmosphere where a “quick draw” sword art might be useful on being attacked.

Many of the Iaido koryu trace their lineage back to Hayashizaki Jinsuke who developed the art around 1600. Muso Jikiden Eishin-ryu, traces its line through over 20 headmasters to Hayashizaki. There are other schools which contain an iai art, some claiming to be older than Hayashizaki, some younger. I won't go through the individual iaido schools since most practice in similar ways to what I have described above.

NINJUTSU

Another relatively common source of Japanese sword practice is the various Ninjutsu dojo. Having experienced the rise of Ninjutsu after the Kung Fu craze, and it's retreat in the face of the Brazilian jujutsu fad, I'm not really sure how many dojo are left. Many of those that are, now claim descent from several more or less mainstream sword and jujutsu koryu. I haven't examined any of these in much detail, but, as with Aikido your experience of the sword is going to depend mainly on the instructor. Pretty much by self-definition, however, you will not be learning how to be a “samurai” but how to be an “anti-samurai” agent in these schools.

SHINKENDO

Toshishiro Obata, movie actor, stunt man, student of Aikido, Nakamura-ryu, and other things has developed his own style of sword practice with wooden weapons which is highly reminiscent (to me at least) of Aikido sword practice. He also includes test cutting with metal blades. This art is in the process of development, but there are several dojo in the USA and Canada.

TOYAMA-RYU/NAKAMURA-RYU/BATTO

I've lumped these arts, derived mostly from the teachings of Nakamura Hakudo, into one grouping although the reality is a bit more complex. These groups practice sword drawing (iai), test cutting, and in some cases, partner practice with wooden weapons. There are a few dojo scattered about in the west.

Both these last two arts are recent developments (since WWII) out of older schools. It remains to be seen how closely they remain tied to the older methods of practice.

THE KORYU

At this point we've pretty much exhausted the common sources of Japanese sword training, and come to the old schools themselves. These arts are not common in Japan, and even less so outside that country. In fact I would guess that most of the old schools are completely unrepresented in the West, and those that are, might be represented by a single individual. I will likely forget a few of the schools in what follows so take it as a representative list, rather than as a comprehensive list.

SHINDO MUSO-RYU

One koryu that is actually quite well represented outside Japan is Shindo Muso-ryu, a school known mostly for jodo, but which also practises the sword, both as an attacking weapon for jo training, and as an art in itself represented by the Shinto-ryu sword kata.

As mentioned previously, there are many dojo in Europe that are associated with the various national Kendo federations. There are also dojo in Europe and in North America which are affiliated with independent organizations or individual instructors. It will be several years before the Kendo federations in North America begin to support jodo, even to the extent that they support iaido now.

At this time SMR jodo is likely too large to ever be unified again under a single headmaster, and outside the Kendo federation there is no system of competition to encourage a unified practice so one can expect the art to drift into several streams as Aikido has done.

Jodo traces it's lineage back to Muso Gunnosuke, who lived in the first half of the 17th century. It was nourished through many generations in the Kuroda clan and was consolidated in its present form by Shimizu sensei, the last (25th) headmaster who popularized the art in Tokyo, and who introduced it into the Kendo Federation.

KASHIMA-SHINRYU

The Kashima-Shinryu has become quite well known in the west through the writings of Karl Friday, a menkyo kaiden in the art who now teaches history at the University of Georgia. There are dojo in Georgia, California, Montana and one in Europe (I may have forgotten one). This makes the Kashima-Shinryu one of the "up and comers" in the koryu universe. The current headmaster is, a university professor who spends at least some time in B.C. but I don't know of any people in that province of Canada who are practising the art.

Kashima-Shinryu is a composite art including several weapons and unarmed practice. Sword practice is done with bokuto, fukuro-shinai and metal blades used for iai (batto) practice.

KATORI SHINTO RYU

This koryu might just be the best known of all, due mainly to the writings of Donn Draeger who was a student of the "original" dojo under Ritsuke Otake sensei. There are no other branch dojo of this "original", if you want to drink from this cup you go to Japan and hope to be accepted by Otake sensei.

There are, however, instructors of Katori Shinto-ryu outside Japan. These come from at least three sources, two of which I believe trace back to the third. Sugino sensei, who died recently, studied Katori Shinto-ryu under the previous head instructor (prior to Otake sensei taking on the job) and was granted permission to teach the art. He taught in his own dojo, and also at the Aikido headquarters where Sugawara sensei, and Mochizuki sensei (of Yoseikan budo) studied the art. These three have passed the art on to many students in the west who continue to practice.

Eventually this will lead to a situation where the “branch” will be more influential than the “root” which is not uncommon in the history of these schools. Katori Shinto is also a multi-weaponed art, and the sword practice includes bokuto and metal bladed practice.

KOGEN ITTO-RYU (CLASSICAL KENDO)

In the USA there are two or perhaps three schools of Kogen Itto-ryu style kendo. One in Ohio and one in Utah. These dojo practice a variant of kendo which includes a modified scoring system and expanded targets. They also practice iai and kata with bokuto.

TENDO-RYU NAGINATA

The International Naginata Federation (which practices Atarashii Naginata or “modern” naginata, a competitive art rather like kendo) functions like the International Kendo Federation with the competitive art being homogeneous, and with various koryu arts being associated. In the west there are several dojo which practice one of these koryu, the Tendo-ryu which, like Shindo Muso-ryu, contains sword training as an adjunct to the main weapon. In this case the naginata, a pole weapon with a curved blade at the tip.

YAGYU SHINKAGE RYU

There are a couple of dojo on the East coast of the USA which offer Yagyū Shinkage-ryū training. This art includes practice with bokuto, with a bamboo weapon called a fukuro-shinai (a single split bamboo stave encased in leather), and with metal blades. The bokuto and fukuro-shinai are used in set partner practice while the metal blades are used in iai practice (called Batto).

ARAKI-RYU

One example of a school represented by a single individual in the West would be the Araki-ryu. Ellis Amdur teaches the art in the northwestern USA to a very few students. He learned the art in a similar sized class.

These last two arts might be considered “classical” type koryu dojo in that the lineage is very direct, from teacher to very few pupils, with no intention or desire to teach large numbers of students. It is from arts like these that Western students of the sword have got the idea that the koryu were “secretive” things that required special initiation ceremonies, fancy handshakes, and official letters of recommendation. From what I’ve learned by talking to members of these schools I suspect the greater reality is that the “secrecy” comes from being small and hard to find rather than any deliberate attempt to keep students out. If you should stumble upon a teacher of one of these arts, go ahead and talk to him or her. Ask about his/her training, his instructors, and his current connection with the school in Japan. If they are legitimate they will answer the questions, I have yet to find a student of one of the koryu who wasn’t willing to talk your ear off.

If you’re satisfied with the chat, ask to train. If the instructor has taken a liking to you, you’ll be welcome. If they don’t like you, or if they’re not interested in more students they’ll tell you no. I very much doubt you’ll be asked to sit at the temple gate for a week in the rain, or asked to perform some special deed before being accepted. If you are, you’d better think deeply about just what kind of instructor you have just encountered.

OTHER CLASSICAL STYLED SCHOOLS

If everyone in the sword world isn’t mad at me now, I’ll try and make up for that and collect the last few folks here.

I call these last schools “classical styled” since none of them can provide an independently verifiable history or lineage more than one or perhaps two generations past the current headmaster. They seem to be largely Western phenomena, unknown in Japan but definitely rooted in Japanese sword practice. The schools are usually relatively small but often quite well known due to extensive media coverage. Examples of these arts are the Kaze Arashi-ryu, and the arts headed by Fredrick Lovret and Don Angier.

That’s not to say they aren’t good places to practice the sword, just that you many not find any firm connections to Japan. If you happen across one of these arts, or any of the other arts for that matter, check it out, talk to the students, talk to the instructor, watch a class, try a class, and then decide for yourself if this is the route you want to take to samurai-hood.

If that all seems too much trouble but you still want to be a samurai, call me and we’ll talk about a high rank in Daidokoro-ryu for a modest donation to the building fund. Now I think I’ll go and hide for a month or two.

Just what does a "Black Belt" mean?

Kim Taylor for Sports Express, 2008

For those who aren't in the martial arts, the idea of earning a "Black Belt" is often assumed to be a great step, but just what does a black belt mean?

In Aikido I spent 11 years getting to black belt (shodan or 1dan), and that wasn't all that unusual in Canada, the bare minimum was about 5 years. While this seems standard in the West, I suspect this isn't the case in Japan, where teaching ranks would come in around 5-6dan, but in Canada at shodan you can teach in an independent dojo under the Canadian Aikido Federation. In the Canadian Kendo Federation the system is coordinated with Japan, and you can teach at 5dan, which in Canada would take a minimum of 12 years after getting a shodan rank (6 months to a year to shodan for most adults), which equates pretty closely to my experience getting a shodan in Aikido.

Although 5dan is Kendo federation (ZenKenRen) teaching rank, I would be willing to bet there aren't all that many 5dan in Japan with their own dojo, I suspect the actual rank to begin teaching there would be somewhere between 6 and 7dan on average). In other words, in ZenKenRen the ranks from 1kyu to 3dan or so would be equivalent to about 5kyu to 3kyu in Aikido in seriousness and difficulty. Kyu ranks drop down as you pass them, with 1kyu being just below 1dan, dan ranks then go up in number as you pass them.

Put in your time and get the rank until you start getting near the place where you can officially start teaching, then the judges start looking closely at you. If you ignore differences in the actual rank this happens, I suspect most organizations act pretty much the same way.

Contrary then, to the common thinking in the west, a "black belt" is not equivalent between different arts, or between different countries, but time to teaching rank may actually be more consistent than one suspects.

Should rank be standard around the world? In the International Kendo Federation, sure, since FIK rank from Indonesia is good in Holland. But koryu (old school) rank is going to vary from head-instructor (menkyo) to head-instructor, and there's no reason for it not to do so. Each of those grading systems is independent of the other. In the FIK you have multiple 8dans and multiple menkyo holders so it CAN be standardized since they all look at each other.

It's impossible that grades would ever be coordinated across several organizations of course, who would enforce that, and how?

"Black belt" vs "classical grades", which are better?

Talking about the virtues of grading in a modern organization such as the FIK which gives dan grades or in a koryu system with its own certification system may be rather a moot point given that people training for the same period of time are likely to have the same skill level. If you put in your time seriously and you've got an instructor that has a minimum level of skill in teaching then you will get to

a certain level after a certain time. So what's the problem? If you like koryu licenses better than FIK licenses, do those. The licenses don't magically provide the skill level, nor do they even indicate it except in a very rough way, that level is only demonstrated when you get on the floor and start swinging sticks.

In ZenKenRen you have to please a panel of several instructors, the majority (if not all) of whom are not your instructor (after, of course, you please your instructor who puts you up for the grade). In koryu you just have to please your instructor and maybe his boss. Either way you get or don't get your rank depending on both your skill and who you've annoyed lately. If you annoyed your instructor you don't get a grade. If your instructor annoyed the guys above him (in either system) you don't get the grade (provided the guys above are petty and vindictive, and that too, I suggest, is organization independent).

I'll leave it up to others to debate which system (committee or direct instructor) is most objective or maintains the most objective standards or whatever. I suspect the important point to take home is that you put in the time and you gain the skill (unless you're hopeless).

What do Grades Mean Anyway?

There are some smaller arts out there that don't have any grading system at all. If it's one dojo with 10 or 20 people than what's the point of any kind of grading or certification? Everyone knows who came into the dojo first, who's spent the most time training, and what skill level each has. It's only when you get into larger organizations that you need some way to compare skill levels, or time in, or permission to teach etc. If you don't know the fellow who just walked in the door, it's handy to have some way to peg where to put him in the class before you start.

If you are in a grading system, such as the ZenKenRen, the demands of the grading increase as you go up in grade. By the time you start to challenge 8dan, very very few people pass, and even fewer pass on their first try. I have heard a story from a member of the Japanese grading panel on the iaido side that a soke (headmaster) of one of the old iaido schools has tried the exam many times but been failed each time. He puts too much of his own school into the ZenKenRen iaido techniques and refuses to do them the "kendo" way since that would mess up his koryu. Everyone understands the situation, and he doesn't seem to mind attempting the exams and failing. Why? Perhaps the process may be more important than the result. I can think of several other reasons for doing it, including exposing the top grading people in the ZenKen to his style of iai, which is one of the smaller styles.

At the lower rank levels grades may seem to be more or less automatic as I mentioned above. In the CKF we do fail people starting at 1kyu, but we aren't grading hundreds of people per grade level (more like scores at the kyu and shodan levels). In Aikido I used to go to summer camp and was quite offended that on a three year cycle everyone, the whole group from kyu to yondan/godan or so, passed two years, then on the third everyone failed and we got a lecture about slipping standards. I argue instead for looking at the individual and what he does on the day of the exam. I've passed students of mine who do a good job on the day but don't seem quite up to it in class, and I've failed students of mine who blew their exam but do quite well in class. I don't know if that's fair or not but it's the way I figure it should be done. The other four or five people on the panel have their own ways of looking at things I'm sure, but it's surprising just how consistent the passes and fails are.

What do I get with my Dan rank?

In some dojo the students line up according to rank, in others it's according to seniority. My club seems to have people who compete to sit in the low spot in the dojo, sometimes the most senior people jockey to see who can be the most humble. Occasionally I need to re-arrange them so that there are people spread across the floor. Mostly though they come in and sit down wherever they happen to be.

I can't think of much else that one gets with one's rank. Perhaps in a more commercialized organization one's pay scale might be related to rank, but for us it seems that the more rank, the more crappy organizational jobs you get to take on.

As I have often said, rank is a punishment, not a reward.

Bio: Kim Taylor holds renshi 7dan iaido and 5dan jodo in the Canadian Kendo Federation. He sits on the national grading committee of each art. He also holds 1dan in Aikido and teaches Niten Ichiryu, an old sword art. He is the author of several instructional manuals and books which are available through sdksupplies.com.

Women in the dojo? I THINK not.

By Dale Flowery 1999

I remember years ago when the first woman stepped foot in the weight room at my local gym. All us guys clapped at her bravery, and we helped her lift because she really wanted to get strong. What fools we were, as soon as the other women found out she was there they started lifting too. Then they started complaining about the furnace room we were using and the weights got moved to a carpeted room with mirrors (which attracted the body builders). Soon after that they made everyone wear shoes and shirts, they told us we couldn't spit on the floor, and they told us we couldn't swear or even yell when we lifted.

Then the tourists came, these scrawny little guys that show up just to watch the women's crotches and plug up the equipment. No, we should never have applauded that woman, we should have shoved her right back out the door.

The martial arts are a serious business, and so far, at least in the traditional arts, women are a much appreciated rarity. I'm talking about the real martial arts, the weapons arts. I've been doing koryu bujutsu for almost 20 years now and there hasn't been more than 20 women in all the classes I've attended so far. It's been lovely, all the students concentrating on the arts and not on the tarts. There's a reason why monks are celibate, and women forbidden in the monastery.

Women don't like swords and sticks. They don't like the boring repetition of the koryu, months and years of going through the same simple movements with nary a "self defence" application in sight. No chance to roll around on the floor with a sweaty guy either. Just the stick, the hiss of danger and the hair standing up on the back of your neck as you move out of the way.

But now what do I see, in this very magazine? Aerobic kickboxing! Half dressed models on the cover! Martial arts as "self defence"! What's next, fashion advice? This is a very dangerous trend and when I was asked to write this column I was never warned about it. Well I'll warn you all now, music in the dojo, fitness and fashion tips, articles discussing the self defence applications of martial arts can all lead to women in the dojo!

Trust me, you don't want that. It leads to pastel colours and no spitting rules.

Yours in Budo

Dale Flowery

Insert calligraphy for "dirt"

Musical Budo? I don't THINK so.

By Dale Flowery 1999

With the amount and volume of music that blasts from the typical McDojo these days, a consideration of the role of noise in exercise might be in order.

RHYTHM IN DANCE

By the usual definition of dance, music must be used when dancing. Dance is a physical interpretation of a piece of music. It should not, however, be forgotten that the dance and the music are inseparable. Too often I hear popular songs being played at unbelievable volumes while dancers move to what seems to be some other piece of music. This is of course only an opinion, but perhaps these dancers should stop hiding behind the volume (noise) and listen to the music instead. The way to overcome embarrassment and awkwardness is to lose the ego and "become Dancer". Internalize the music and it will not need to be loud. High volumes are necessary only if the mind is filled with scurrying little thoughts that get in the way of hearing the sounds. (Remember that the whole purpose of Budo is to get rid of those thoughts and lose the ego entirely.)

The rhythms of dance are imposed from without by the music. This is by design. If dance is used as a vehicle of the Daido (great way), then this imposition of rhythm is used. The dancer gives him or herself over to the music and forgets the self entirely. This is the method of the Dervish dancers of the Sufi. By submerging the ego in the rhythm of the music the dancer can move out of the artificial shell of the "self". When dance is used as a "way" the music does not have to be loud, in fact it need only be remembered in the mind. This is because the dancer reaches out to hear the sounds.

An inattentive dancer must have loud music of course, and not all dancers are students of the Daido. I would point out however that the best dancers will explain their abilities in a way that sounds quite "way-like".

Dance, when practised in its traditional role is not different than Budo, both are vehicles of the "way". We will return to the concept of rhythm later.

MUSIC IN "AEROBICS"

Lets move on to an exercise form that is peculiarly Western and of recent origin. "Aerobics" with a capital letter is an exercise form that seems to have begun as a combination of dance with calisthenics. Keeping in mind the form is still emerging, its purpose seems to be selfishly goal directed. One does aerobics for the same reason one does body-building, so that the "self" will look better, and live longer. The quantity of life is addressed but as yet the quality seems neglected. Being fit, you will argue, improves the quality of life. True to a certain extent, but it is the means we are discussing not the ends.

EXERCISE AS MEDICINE

The use of music during Aerobics seems to have sparked the use of music during all exercise, running, swimming and weight lifting included. The rationale for using music during Aerobics is that it helps the exerciser do more work. Music is used as a distraction so that one can get through the workout which, after all, is work and is only a necessary means to the end of looking good and getting that endorphin high. In order to provide the maximum distraction the music must be almost deafening. This noise is further enhanced by the instructor attempting to scream over the music. Along with shin splints, instructor's throat must be one of the newer exercise related injuries.

The Aerobics argument that the beat of the music is needed so that everyone can count together and move together is not available to other exercise forms such as weight lifting. In fact, if one is engaged in serious weight lifting, a distraction like loud music can be dangerous. Fortunately most lifters are not that serious and those that are, can concentrate well enough to ignore the noise.

This is not a diatribe against music, but against what it represents. The attitude that exercise is something that you have to "get through" by using the distraction of loud noise is one that will prevent obtaining any benefit from Budo. Any form of activity can be used as a tool to progress along the "way". Serving tea, arranging flowers, sitting, walking and running have all been used, and are still being used as vehicles of Daido. What is necessary is to simply do what you are doing, to pay attention to your activity and to do it with no goal in mind. If you wish to study the Daido you cannot think of exercise as if it was medicine that has to be taken so that you will get better.

To make exercise a "way", simply perform it with full attention to what you are doing. Do not think about other things, do not play loud music which will only stir up distracting thoughts in your mind. Just pay attention to your actions and work out for no other reason than working out. Do not even allow yourself to think "I'm working out so that I will progress on the way". Just work.

RHYTHM IN BUDO

To move away from the use of music in exercise for a while, let's consider the martial arts. Timing and rhythm are key points in Budo. (This is why martial arts cannot be learned from books.) It would seem at first glance that music and Budo are compatible since rhythm and timing are involved.

INTERNAL TIMING

To learn a movement and its proper rhythm a student watches and copies a teacher. At some times both teacher and student perform the motion together, but usually the students sit and watch while the instructor demonstrates. This means that the student must, with no assistance from music or even a metronome, remember what was done, and in what timing. The student then performs the action.

I hope it is fairly obvious what would happen to this process if the student is distracted (by music) and cannot pay complete attention to the instructor. It may not be as obvious that in most martial arts the rhythm of motion cannot be accommodated to an external source (music). The techniques require changing speeds that are not matched to a beat. More importantly, acceleration and deceleration during a motion absolutely preclude an external beat.

It is this factor that separates martial arts from dance. In some countries the martial arts were forbidden by the authorities and the movements were put to music to disguise them as dance. This is what they became, dance. In order to be returned to a martial art the music would have to be removed and the proper rhythms re-learned. Don't ever make the mistake of thinking that you can learn a martial art in a "kickboxercise" class.

Once a student of Budo has copied an instructor and understood the technique, he or she is expected to forget all that has been learned and make the art his or her own. A large part of this process will be to make very subtle changes to the rhythm of the movements. These changes will reflect the body shape and abilities of the student. They should not, it is hoped, reflect a desire on the part of the student to look different. By this stage the timing of the art should be part of the body itself and the presence or absence of an external beat should have no effect.

At this level the student would no longer feel any need for music during practice. It would serve no purpose as an aid to learning, and a distraction is the last thing desired.

EXTERNAL TIMING

Each Budo has a distinct internal timing for its movements. Being a martial or combative art, the necessity for an external timing also exists. There is always an opponent that must be considered and that opponent will be moving with a rhythm different than your own. The first tool in dealing with an opponent is the learning process described above. Learning to match the timing of the instructor will allow you to match the timing of the opponent. You must be able to adjust your rhythm and timing to the man opposite you in order to fight him.

There are countless matching exercises in the martial arts that allow you to cope with an opponent's rhythm. Fine, here is a good place to put music to use. The rhythm of music can be used as a tool to learn to match an external rhythm.

Listen to a piece of music. Can you, within three notes predict when the next beat will occur? You have just extracted as much benefit as you are going to get from that piece of music. An opponent is not going to move in a predictable pattern. That is the purpose of the changing rhythms in martial arts movements. Learn to match your motions to a piece of music and you will become predictable.

After learning how to match the rhythm of an opponent you can then move to a broken timing in order to disrupt his rhythm. This broken timing involves an acceleration, deceleration, or pause which will create a "suki", an opening or gap through which you can attack. Finding and using a suki requires absolute concentration on what you are doing here and now. This intense concentration is what allows the Budo to be a vehicle for the Daido.

BUDO TO MUSIC

Despite these factors martial arts routines can be seen performed to music at many tournaments. Please remember what you are watching. These are routines designed to win a prize, they are goal directed activities and are not being performed to progress along the way. Music has audience appeal and this, along with spiffy uniforms can win competitions.

A traditional Budo routine may be shown publicly but it is not performed to music. It may, depending on the show, be performed "with" music I suppose but that is simply coincidence. Traditional Budo are not performed in public to win prizes or to impress students. They are performed because it was requested, and because the performers see a benefit to their progress in undergoing the stress of public performance. There is certainly no temptation to set the routines to music, no matter how boring they are to the public.

It is hoped that the foregoing has pointed out the difference between the timing and rhythm required in the martial arts and the playing of music that is required in dance or in other forms of exercise. One of the prime hints for living in accordance with the way..if it is not needed, lose it.

Entitlement

Empty Cup, 2005, A column about the martial arts. Each month we examine a different aspect of the philosophy behind the martial arts.

Time and time again I see students and even teachers who expect, who KNOW that they are entitled to the next grade, to respect, to special treatment, simply because they exist.

I suspect you've met them too. The students who come to class late because they had to finish dinner (as if you've eaten yet). The student who can't tie his shoes but figures that since he's put in the time in class, you should let him try for the next grade. The instructor who figures she can wander out to have a drink of water while the class is doing push-ups. The instructor who, by the great feat of being a "black belt" figures the students ought to buy the beer for him after class.

All these folks feel that they are entitled to whatever it is they want. A very strange notion indeed, and one I'd like to take a look at this month. I think entitlement has somehow come to be the modern idea of "human rights". Where we once fought for the idea that every human has a basic right to life, freedom, and an equal chance at success, we now find people who figure that their cold is enough reason for you to rearrange your life and reschedule a class.

Or perhaps it comes from the idea that life should be fair. We teach our kids very early that things should be "fair", that everyone should get the same portion of candy (never mind that Suzy is twice the size of Johnny, or that Billy has diabetes). But somehow, a praiseworthy notion like "fair" gets twisted into it's evil twin "not-fair" as in, "She got more than I did and That's Not Fair!" and now we're into the idea of "rights" and "entitlement". I don't care if I don't like black licorice, I have a right to half, I'm entitled to half, that's only fair.

Now the problem comes in trying to figure out who decides what's fair. Every kid will tell you the answer of course... they do. I'm entitled to as much as I think is fair. Now this seems silly to us grown-ups but really, it's no worse than the idea that the "personal is political", a rather strange notion that your personal feelings, what happens to you, is somehow relevant to the laws of the land. What inconveniences you is what should be legislated against. Don't like walking to the corner to cross the street? Well we'd better install a light half way through the block!

You're starting to get the idea aren't you? The idea of entitlement is really just good old fashioned "selfishness" raised to a virtue and disguised as some sort of a right.

So what does this have to do with the martial arts? Well the arts are supposed to make better people, so let's see how they deal with selfishness.

First, we have the idea that life is fair. That gets knocked out of us pretty early when we see that some students "get it" easily while we struggle to learn the art. Life really isn't fair and we aren't all equal... at least not in ability. We all get the same chance to fall (or get knocked) on our butts but that's about it.

What about the idea that what we feel about things is important? Well that goes out the window too. Nothing interferes more quickly with learning a martial art than having an emotional investment in that art. The more we feel about the art, the more we want to do well, want to look good, want to succeed, the worse we get.

But never mind all that, it's too subtle to really matter. What really counts is selfishness, and how the various martial arts deal with that... or more to the point, how they don't deal with it.

The arts require a partner, either someone who teaches, or someone to practice with or against. You can't invent this stuff, you can't learn it on your own, it has to be handed down from one person to another. So you need someone else, you need to rely on someone else, you can't think only of yourself. The student who doesn't make it to class on time puts his fellow students back, they don't have someone to practice with. The teacher who shows up late teaches the students that it's OK to be late.

Let's go back to fairness, if a class is fair, than everyone gets the same degree of attention from the teacher. But the worst students actually get the most attention. Not fair.

Teacheritis

Kim Taylor for Sports Express, 080521

Over the years in several martial arts I've had a thought or two about teaching, who wants to, who should, even who should not.

Here's a scenario that illustrates the different attitudes to teaching and, by extension, to the character of the participating students. Big teacher comes to town for a seminar. Students line up, who's at the front and who's at the back? Now the class starts, who's "helping" and who's practising?

There's two ways to line up in a class, at the front and at the back. Seniors get to pick where they go because they can tell their juniors to bump over. So here you have the, perhaps only once a year, chance to learn a bit. Where are the seniors? I know where I am, and it's not because I'm told to be there, I figure you've got a better chance to learn, a better chance to be called forward and ripped apart, if you're down front. Not only that but if you're down front you don't have to watch any of the juniors behind you, for a while they're someone else's problem and you can concentrate on your own problems. When you're near the beginners they are very likely to turn to you and say "what's he mean by that?" every 12 seconds instead of being silent and watching the front.

On the other hand, you get some seniors who want to hide, who don't want to be embarrassed, humiliated and belittled by the visiting teacher. Call me a masochist but I love that stuff. Then again, I don't much care what my students think of me either.



Once the class starts you get even more insight on who's what in their own minds. It can start as early as two or three weeks practice, and you see the teacheritis bug hit. Nothing better than a beginner who wants to tell you what sensei really means since his own sensei has told him how to do this technique.

But there's the seniors too, still hiding out but now they're doing it by "helping" the juniors instead of working on their own practice. It's easier to avoid the hard work of learning by assuming you know it already and can assist sensei by teaching instead. Wrong wrong wrong. Unless sensei tells you to help, take the chance to learn. The time to disappear is when sensei is looking for someone to take the absolute beginners off to one side so the rest of the class can move along. Me, I'm shrinking back into the shadows and letting someone else step forward. There's always someone who wants to be picked by sensei to teach the beginners isn't there? Someone who can then say "sensei picked me to teach the beginners".

I don't want to teach them, I want to learn from sensei.

Now I may be a bit misleading here, there are some folks who have physical problems, who can't practice as hard as they used to when they were young but you know, sensei can see that. Get down front and do as much as you can for as long as you can and rest when you have to but keep your butt on the floor and listen hard. If you have to drag a chair up to the side of the room you can still sit and listen and learn. Teaching is a lousy way to rest... or rather, someone who is resting is a lousy teacher.

Teaching can be one of the fastest ways to stop a student in his tracks. You have to be very careful who you assign a teaching role because for many people that's it for their learning. "I'm a teacher so I've got nothing left to learn, now I teach". Ouch. Not only do those guys make lousy teachers, they can also pass on that attitude to the students. The best students to assign as assistants are the ones who hate it, who beg to be let off, who don't want to teach, but want only to learn. Those are the ones who will keep learning while they're teaching.

As I've said before, rank is a punishment, and so's teaching. Anything that takes you away from learning is to be avoided by all good students.

Bio: Kim Taylor holds renshi 7dan iaido and 5dan jodo in the Canadian Kendo Federation. He sits on the national grading committee of each art. He also holds 1dan in Aikido and teaches Niten Ichiryu, an old sword art. He is the author of several instructional manuals and books which are available through sdksupplies.com.

Kim Taylor, Niten Ichiryu and Shinto Ryu

2012 Journal of Asian Martial Arts

Bionote:

Kim Taylor is an associate editor for Journal of Asian Martial Arts. He holds a BSc (biology and philosophy) and MSc (microbiology) from the University of Guelph where he worked for 24 years. He is currently the president of SDKsupplies.com and a co-owner of Proswords.com both martial art supply companies. Taylor holds teaching rank in Aikido, Iaido and Jodo, sits on the national grading panel for iaido and jodo, and is chair of the Canadian Kendo Federation Jodo section. Along the way Taylor has also practised and taught several Japanese sword and stick koryu. An author of many instructional books and videos, he continues to edit and publish the Electronic Journals of Martial Arts and Sciences EJMAS.com

Article:

Where I learned these techniques:

These techniques come from two different schools of Japanese sword, and from two of the most important instructors for me personally and for Canadian iaido and jodo. Matsuo Haruna from Okayama taught iaido in Canada from 1991 until his death and was instrumental in developing most of the senior instructors in the country. He was tireless in his promotion of our iai and jo to the point where we now constitute 20 percent of the Canadian Kendo Federation membership. Following a somewhat offhand request one evening over beer and noodles, Haruna sensei taught Niten Ichiryu to a few students for several years beginning in the early 1990s. I considered my license to teach Niten came from the third visit when Haruna sensei rather pointedly asked me where all the other students were as we started our class. I later understood for myself that if an instructor teaches you something, he expects it to be passed along.

The technique Ai Sen which I present here came to represent the essence of Musashi's sword style for me. Direct, no-nonsense and almost arrogant, this technique requires much confidence and not a little courage to perform. It is the final technique of the kodachi seiho, the set demonstrating techniques of short sword against long.

Upon learning that some of us were studying jodo, Haruna sensei helped us bring jodo instructors to Canada, eventually introducing us to Shigenori Namitome from Fukuoka. Namitome sensei was chair of the jodo section for the All Japan Kendo Federation and after the death of Haruna sensei, became a staunch defender and supporter of Canadian iaido as well as jodo. On a visit to Japan a few years back we spent some time practising in Namitome sensei's dojo where he chided me on knowing the walking stick techniques (Uchida Ryu Tanjojutsu) associated with Shindo Muso Ryu jodo, but not the sword techniques (Shinto Ryu). After a bit of back and forth discussion worthy of a martial arts movie he finally consented to teach us the 12 kata of the set.

The technique Tsuki Dachi is the final short sword kata and final kata of the set which includes eight long sword and four short sword techniques. The technique has many similarities to Ai Sen as you will see, it is direct, no-nonsense and like Musashi, Muso was not a little arrogant as this technique seems to

indicate to me.

Memorable incidents involving these techniques:

Performing these two techniques originating from two contemporary giants of the early Edo period in Japan's history is a memorable event each and every time. As I mentioned, these techniques require more than a little courage to perform. There is no trick here, no evasion, one offers a target and then takes it away. Miss the timing or the distance and you are dealing with an injury, even if you are using wooden swords. If I had to pick one memory involving Ai Sen from Niten Ichiryu, it would be the amused look on Haruna sensei's face when he demonstrated this to me for the first time, one moment I was swinging to strike through his undefended head and the next the tip of his short sword was touching my throat, my own sword useless beside his knee and my expression obviously one of open mouthed amazement. It was not the first or the last time I had caused sensei to laugh by my efforts to live up to his instruction, but it is my favourite.

Thinking of a memorable incident while performing Tsuki Dachi is easy, it is the day I learned the technique in Namitome sensei's personal dojo with it's red pine floors dented to golf-ball consistency by years of stick and sword hits. The light from the afternoon sun coming in through floor level windows reflected from the wood in thousands of points while a breeze through the bamboo grove behind the building made a sound I'll never forget. Laughter and sweat and fear, the most delightful combination one can experience during a career in the martial arts.

Tips on practising these techniques:

Ai Sen and Tsuki Dachi share common characteristics. They both require the swordsman to stay directly on the attack line through the entire technique. Because of this the opponent must be controlled by giving him a single irresistible target and the swordsman must have the patience to wait until the opponent has committed his swing toward that target. Once this happens there is little time to react and defeat him. Fear must not be allowed to tighten muscles and delay the movements, everything is bet on a single swing and response, there is no room for error or adjustment, they either work or they do not.

By offering your head or your hand you must control the opponent's actions. He must believe that he has no choice but to swing at the targets offered, if he thinks that you will not simply run him over should he fail to attack, the technique will fail. Total commitment to the kata, and total faith in the founders of the school and all the instructors down to your own is required to make these techniques real.

Ai Sen begins by placing the shoto, edge down across the chest at shoulder height. From this position it seems as if the swordsman has given up and is completely open to attack. The swordsman walks directly toward the opponent and lets him swing. As the opponent swings at the swordsman's head, the swordsman closes his hand and extends his arm to sweep the sword off the attack line to his left side. After striking aside the sword the swordsman rotates the shoto in his hand and thrusts into the throat of the opponent. In order to perform this technique properly the swordsman must wait until the opponent is committed to his attack and then attack into it. In order to be able to sweep the sword to the side the shoto must sweep down the long sword's side. The most difficult skill is to adjust the pacing toward the opponent so that even if he does cut down he will only skim the forehead of the swordsman. This lets the short sword strike the long sword at its weakest part, near the tip where it is moving fastest. Ai Sen is a sen no sen timing, the swordsman attacks into the attack.

Tsuki Dachi begins with the swordsman holding the shoto, edge to his left, directly in line with the opponent's throat and approaching boldly. If the opponent does not react the swordsman must have the intent to thrust through the opponent's throat. Seeing this intent, the opponent will strike the shoto or the swordsman's right hand away before attacking on his own behalf. As the strike is made to his exposed hand, the swordsman snaps it away and then strikes down on the wrist of the opponent before he can recover. Like Ai Sen patience is demanded of this technique until the opponent commits fully to the strike. Taking the target away and striking into the opening which is created by the failed attack takes a relaxed and unwavering movement. Tsuki Dachi is a go no sen, an avoidance of the attack and a counter-attack into weakness.

Ai Sen



Fig 1: Hold the shoto in this position across the chest, the hand lightly open with the fingers ready to snap the blade to your left.



Fig 2: approach the opponent directly, in a normal walking position, hips square to the front.



Fig 3: Snap the shoto to the left, pivoting on the wrist, do not move the right hand toward the centreline until after you have struck the sword aside. Do not move to either side of the attack line.



Fig 4: Move the right hand to the centreline while turning the shoto so that it is now edge to the right with your palm down. Move directly and strongly forward into the opponent to thrust his throat. Your feet will be together at this point.

Tsuki Dachi



Fig 1: Raise the shoto to your own throat height and hold it parallel to the ground aimed at the opponent's throat. See the headshot for a front view of this position.



Fig 2: Approach within attack range of the opponent with the full intent of running him through.



Fig 3: When the opponent strikes at your attacking hand pull your right foot back to your left and at the same time swing the shoto up and to the side.



Fig 4: Keeping the wrist in the same position use your whole arm as your "sword" and strike down on the opponent's right wrist as you move your own right foot forward again into attack range.

The Sword of Sci-fi

Or what happens when you fall through the Alternate Universe Interface.

People do all the time, actually, whether by a spaceship to Mars or a magic portal to the fairy universe. It's why we practice swordfighting isn't it? Just so we'll be on a par with the beings of the other place who have studied sword all their lives. Of course we'll have some sort of advantage along with our sword skills, lighter gravity, some sort of genetic twin effect that lets us be a magician, that sort of thing.

Assuming that swordsmen in this other realm learn rather than inherit genetically their sword skills, we can assume their training and skills are going to grow the same as ours. So from a swordsman point of view, let's help the writers.

First, what do we have to work with? We should remember that there have always been swordsmen on earth. At no time since the sword was invented have we ever been without sword training of some sort. Up to a hundred years ago the sword was a basic weapon of war. It was only at the end of the second world war that the horse and saber were retired and so I am one of the first folks who grew up in a non-military sword time.

The bayonet on the other hand, is still with us, or at least was the last time I paid any attention, put a knife on the end of an assault rifle and you have an edged weapon about the size of a sword. This is quite a different weapon than the original bayonet which was a sword on a long rifle/gun that was intended to be a pike rather than a sword. It was for resisting cavalry charges without needing old-style pikemen.

Along with the military sword, which was taught quickly in a basic fashion to adults, we have also always had the duelling sword which spawned, almost instantly, the sport sword and, up to about a hundred years ago, the duelling sword was in use.

The duelling sword would have been taught for a much longer period than the military sword, with salons for young adults to old men and great skills being created. It would have been this serious but continuing training that produced the "zen sword" of today, the idea that practising sword will make you a better gentleman and a better person overall.

Again, contrast the crude, effect-focused sword of the military to the elegant gentleman duellist. Which is your character? Where will he learn his sword?

Then there is the sport sword, this is something that came out of the duelling sword and has seen an explosion of growth in the last, let's say two hundred years. In the west we had the professional prize-fighters of England who came into being about the time the gun made it's appearance on the battlefield. The sword masters needed some reason to carry on. I'm not going to spend time today looking up dates but call it the late 1500s. By the way, there are hundreds of folk out there now who can argue chapter and verse on all this stuff, a writer would be well served to check out the history of the sword on earth if they want to look for a model of sword play on Mars.

In Japan you also had the introduction of the gun around the same time and an enthusiastic adoption by the main players in the unification of the country. The broad history of sword can be compared in the east and the west and would be a great project. Around 1600 both sides of the world had the start of the great schools, the drift from military to civilian sword. In the west this was a struggle as there was no governmental support but in Japan the Samurai class was on top and their main symbol of power was the sword. This meant that the sword had pride of place from 1600 to 1870 before it hit a dip in popularity.

Around the 1700s you see the great apologists for the sword who lament the sissy ways of the modern era when the chemical warfare of explosives made it even easier for a peasant to kill a highly trained swordsman from a distance. Where is the manhood? The decades of training to hone skills that can be blown away with the pull of a trigger?

The sport fencing that we see today began in Japan and Europe in the mid 1700s with kendo and Olympic fencing in the late 1800s.

Japan's elimination of the samurai at the end of the 19th century meant the sword instructors were out of a job and they moved first toward an entertainment model to make a living, then toward instruction of the police and eventually to the sport kendo of today.

Another thing that provided a re-vitalization for kendo in Japan was the militarization from the 1890s onward through the second world war and the rise of the "Bushido code" which was an effort to instill nationalism by appealing to "the old samurai spirit". European appeals to "the old knightly spirit" weren't unheard of during the same period for identical reasons.

What about military sword? Are we done with that? Well, unfortunately no. Change the name from sword to machete and you'll find lots of places where people are still losing limbs and heads to weapons that might have been called Falchion or Scimitar, Shoto or Seax

So there is lots of historical sword training with which to endow our hero as he falls through the magic mirror into our story.

But what if we're into hard core Sci-Fi and not fantasy? We can still find ways to get those swords into the hands of our future generations, and we have.

We may not use the sword when riding in our atomic powered tanks or our ray-gun firing flying platforms but what about off the battlefield? We can use our swords on anyone outside their power-suit. Do we allow massive use of hand-rays on the space station? Well better those neutron-rays than good old fashioned lead slugs that punch holes in the dome, but methinks knives and swords would be a better bet. And make them steel or titanium or amazingum but not so amazing that they will cut through those same bulkheads and lose all our air. So no monomolecular wires or crystal knives or star-wars type light sabers which can cut through anything but another light saber. And why don't they? Well one problem was practical, plexiglass isn't permeable, but the other was that the fights wouldn't last long otherwise, whoever swings in range first wins, no matter what. No defence means a boring fight.

Instead of the environment, why not have another reason to use knives or swords? The personal forcefield of Dune was brilliant, I loved it, and the special method of fighting that had to be developed to defeat it. Slow motion knife fights are wonderful to see.

Of course, if we outline every idea to be had here, who is going to write anything? So let's leave the background and go to the training.

1. Adult Learning Principles.

As a writer you need to know about these if you're going to throw an untrained adult (let's say a computer geek gamer-boy) through the mirror and into a sword-wielding society. This is the military recruit scenario and so you need to get him a teacher and you need to give him an advantage. Make the other folks a bunch of hobbits, now your geek is the high school football linebacker, he's got raw power to back up that sword... did I say sword, why he's now using the blade off a scythe because the swords are like filleting knives to him.

He's still got to learn how to use it. His style is going to be barbarian giant style. You teach him quickly from how to cut, to how to block and cut, to how to avoid, block and cut.

Incremental learning with lots of negative reinforcement, those wooden swords hurt even when your hobbit teacher swings them at you.

Time passes.

There's the key, it doesn't matter how much knowledge the teacher has, how many books fall off the shelf and open conveniently to the chapter on swordplay, it takes time to learn anything. We just don't get it right away.

Unless we have applicable skills already. Your barbarian hero? How about he's a good baseball player? Then we can shortcut a lot of training time, provided the instructor isn't trying to make a silk purse out of this sow's ear. Good heavy blade, swings like a baseball player, blows through all the defences.

2. Shu Ha Ri

What if we're writing from the point of view of a young kid in that sword society? Pretty much any physical skill goes in the stages Shu Ha Ri, memorize the basic movements, break them down or analyze them, use that knowledge to go do it in the messy real world.

Some folks are physically gifted. This means they have a good sense of what their body is doing. Others don't, but the time to mastery of a physical skill is remarkably standard.

Musashi talked about knowing many ways through knowing one way. If you have been taught one skill, it's not hard to apply those learning methods to other skills. It's a matter of starting with simple things and building up to more complex things.

Most people look at the top people in any skill and thing "I could never do that" but Musashi said you start small and work your way up. Want to swing a heavy sword? Start light and work up to it. Take the time and practice.

3. Sword manuals

For your hero? Absolutely you can learn from a book. This idea that you can't learn from books and videos is insane, we do it all the time. Some things are hard to learn from a book but those are the things that you learn after you don't need books any more. How to hold the sword? No problem, learn it from a book. How to keep the tip alive through the suppleness of your wrist? Hard to read and do, but you learn it from practice, not from being told. If you could learn from a teacher's words you could learn it from a book.

Sword manuals for writers? Sure, you can learn from practical manuals with pictures and whatnot, a great idea. The more esoteric principles such as are written down in the Go Rin no Sho? Maybe choose a more modern writer, Musashi's language wasn't easy in 1645, even less so now in translation. But what are the basic principles of Japanese sword? Centerline, pressure, speed, calmness. More complex principles? Breathing, moving from the center, relaxation and strength. And the esoteric? Jo ha kyu (acceleration), maai (distancing), shu ha ri (graduated learning).

All the principles are easy to grasp in your head, but they need time in practice to show up. Distance and timing? Practice. Seme (pressure)? Practice.

What about kigurai and such things? Can you learn them? Not kigurai, it's the opposite of being told something, it's the aura that accumulates to someone through long practice. It's the confidence of someone who has performed a skill for 20 years. Musashi called it, rather unhelpfully, the body of a rock. Other fighters go around you like water goes around a rock.

4. Self teaching

Sure, you can teach yourself to play the guitar. How did that work out for you? It's not impossible, it's just inefficient. It's easier to learn from someone else, that's how we work. It's why we are writing on computers and sending it to each other over the internet. Knowledge builds on knowledge and skills build on skills. "Son, this worked in the past and this didn't, you figure out which you want to do".

Trying to teach yourself guitar isn't a big risk. Trying to teach yourself how to fight to the death with swords is a bit trickier.

5. Training and learning methods.

What happens? Well if our hero is trying to learn how to swing a sword by using a sharp one there's going to be blood and tears in far more abundance than sweat. I once had a ski lesson from my buddies, it consisted of strapping me into rented skis with dull edges, taking me to the top of a hill that was frozen ice rather than snow and telling me "you're fine, you're a natural athlete" and pushing me down. I lost skin and blood and teeth as the tip of the ski met my face when I fell and rolled like a good aikido guy.

Maybe start slow and build up to spring skiing with rented skis? Maybe pick up a couple of sticks and learn swordwork before using the real things?

You think toy swords make toy swordsmen? You never had to spend a year's salary to buy a sword. You are NOT going to learn to drive on the formula one car, who cares if you get hurt, the car doesn't heal. Chips in your sword don't re-grow like cuts on your arm. You're going to learn with a wooden sword, no matter what era of earth's history or which alternate universe. If you're on a space station you're going to learn with blunt metal, not the sharp stuff.

Hopefully, you're not going to pick up the sharp thing until you're ready, but what kind of a story is that? Of course the hero is going to go out and face great odds and somehow win through to self-knowledge in the end. It's a story.

6. Movie swords vs real swords

Remember the light sabers? Real sword fights are a lot of positioning and care and a move and it's over. Even sport fencing (including kendo) is pretty much boring, one guy twitches and the other scores.

People like a bit more action, a bit more drama, they want the hero to work for it. So read those sword manuals, let the hero learn all the big deep psychological lessons but when it comes time to fight the main villain, he'd better become a bit stupid in the physical skills department or the movie is going to be ten minutes short.

Just some random thoughts on the topic. I could see a book on "sword fighting for writers" but I'm not likely to get it done so you guys take a chapter apiece and do it as a collective. Be a good way for the asian and western sword folks to show off at each other.

Feb 25, 2015

What is this Rank and Grading Stuff.

Kendo World, 2013

Everyone, in every martial art eventually asks himself why he is standing in line waiting to go demonstrate in front of a panel in order to try and obtain a piece of paper and the right to be called one more, (or one less kyu) number. And pretty much everyone comes up with the answer of "I don't know". Of course there are many reasons to grade, and a few arguments against, so let's examine some of them.

From the student standpoint.

Most students will have a very self-centered point of view to grading, they will be paying money for the chance to demonstrate their skills and perhaps get the next rank up. So why should they want to do it? Signposts. Having a set of markers along the way toward learning the art, which go all the way "to the top", is a useful tool toward knowing how you're doing, where you're going and a goad to inspire greater effort to get there. Gradings are something to work toward. They are something to judge your progress. They are a set of requirements that help you understand what is required of you next, after you've met the standards for the current grade.

In the Kendo Federation the grades go roughly in three stages. From 1kyu to 3dan we have beginners who are to be encouraged by the progression through the ranks. By third dan (four to five years practice) they should be able to demonstrate the outlines of all the skills required in the art. By fifth dan (another seven years practice) they should know what's "in the book", to be able to perform all the skills of the art competently. Sixth and Seventh dan are where the more esoteric skills are expected, and eighth dan is where a complete understanding of the riai of the art is required. Looking at the various documents dealing with judging will give a pretty good idea of "what can be expected when", during a budo career, so regular gradings will help you stay on track.

There shouldn't be any more than that from a student point of view, a student should not want rank for its own sake, it has no real value beyond bragging rights, but they should only grade as a consequence of time in training and a way to check progress. In the West, however, another reason does occasionally show up, and that's the desire to have enough rank in the local federation to be able to provide grading panels for the students coming up. In Japan this isn't a consideration of course, with plenty of judges available to pretty much all local federations, but in many other countries the loss or gain of a single ranked individual can mean the difference in the ability to offer gradings. As a result of insufficient rank to meet the standards of the IKF, many countries have opted to offer several kyu grades below ikkyu (the most junior grade mentioned by the IKF guidelines). While this allows the local students to do gradings and thus have a feeling of progress through the ranks, it can also result in a wide disparity of skill level when comparing someone who has practised for six years or more, to someone with perhaps a year of practice as they challenge for ikkyu. Unless these situations are carefully explained to the students, those who have spent many years going through many kyu grades may also feel resentment toward those who have risen well into the dan ranks during the same time span.

Understanding this, there will be students in the West (and perhaps the more remote areas of Japan) who would not normally be concerned with grading, but who feel obligated to qualify as judges in order to give back to the art.

Of course, the most powerful incentive of all for a student to grade, is because sensei says "it's time".
What more do you really need?

Why not grade?

Students have many reasons not to grade: lack of funds (a real consideration in some countries), fear of failure, fear of disappointing sensei, lack of time, motivation or interest. These are all powerful and legitimate reasons not to grade and personally I would much rather see a student not grade for one of these reasons than grade due to ego or a desire to "be instructor rank".

From the teacher's standpoint

From a teacher's standpoint, gradings are convenient tools to keep the instruction focused and moving forward, in the same way that students use it personally. Instruction can move into strange corners of the art for months if there is nothing to pull the teacher back onto the main line because "gradings are coming".

Why not grade?

From a teacher's standpoint, the incentive not to want gradings is the opposite as for wanting them. Gradings continually pull the class back from the interesting flora and fauna in those strange corners to the same old "why haven't you guys read the book" lessons on how to pass a test.

From the federation's standpoint.

Gradings, from a federation standpoint, are almost everything. Certainly in the iai and jo sections of the Kendo federation there is really nothing else. In the kendo section we have those tournament things which are probably, come to think about it, more important than gradings. Business speak is all the rage today so what does the kendo business do? It sells rank and promotes tournaments to its members. Since it is a membership driven business, a big part of the plan is to increase membership through... involving current and new members in the gradings and tournaments. I'm not sure if we can put it any more simply than that actually, although I'm sure many folks are gritting their teeth right now. What's wrong with it? Ah the phrase "sells rank". Very well, how about provides instruction and certification in the arts for which it requires fees.

As mentioned above, the ranks from ikkyu to sandan are testing for basic skills acquisition and are judged in such a way as to "encourage" the students. In other words, the judges are looking for reasons to pass the students. Once they have been around long enough to get sandan they are likely staying and so yondan is judged a bit more critically, so now you know why there's a jump between 3 and 4dan. In this way you might say that gradings are promoting the art, or at least membership in the organization, but realistically, how much can we ask from those grading up to sandan?

No, the very act of providing gradings will promote membership in the arts. Especially in the West, where kids don't have much knowledge or appreciation for kendo tournaments, the first thing they want to know is "can I get a black belt"? If there's grading, that's a good thing. Too bad they didn't feel the same way about school.

Managing the "ruling class" (politics? of course)

The nasty bits: Rank is just politics right? Surely you've heard that?

Well, at the upper levels, in many ways it is. Those at the top run things in a sort of hierarchical way that is also sort of consensus driven. To put it more plainly, no organization works well with trouble-making, lazy or selfish people at the top. Why would those at the top currently, promote those who will make it more difficult to manage a volunteer organization. Now, those who have experience with volunteer organizations are laughing, I can hear you, but we're talking theoretically. The "politics" isn't really supposed to be part of the judging criteria, and should actually play no role up to 5dan which is the last "technical" grade where you are judged on what is written in the book. From 6dan you need to show the sort of qualities that are, frankly, suited to allow you to get along with others in the organization, dignity, calmness, thoughtfulness, sensitivity, generosity, being a good role model. In short, some very "political" qualities.

For that matter, simply having too many people at the top makes things unwieldy, so achieving a top grade in one place where there are few people of the highest rank might be more difficult than another place where there is a shortage of that same top rank. Is this fair? For whom, the challenger or the organization? Unfair for one, necessity for the other perhaps.

For a more extreme example of what some would call "politics" I think I'll use my own case as a nanadan iai who took all his gradings in Canada. It has been suggested to me that my grading was somewhat less legitimate since I did not take it in Japan.

But, I reply, all my grading was done under panels made up of visiting Japanese nanadan or hachidan.

Ah, but they are obligated to pass you since you invited them to Canada.

Perhaps, I say, but I suspect the panellists might not appreciate the suggestion that they could be bought for the price of an airfare, especially since we always work them hard at our seminars, so between that and the jetlag they were usually pretty irritable by grading time.

Regardless, perhaps I should have done my grading in Japan anyway. (I graded in Canada because I wanted to grade to 7dan in Canada, it's important to me that we did it, I'm quite proud of that).

Let's look at the foreigner who goes to Japan to grade. He gets passed because he's "needed back home" at that rank so that he can promote the arts.

Perhaps that's true, perhaps that's a consideration. How do we find a fair assessment for our poor nanadan?

A person who lives in Japan and grades will experience no such special consideration as the foreigners at home or in Japan. Perhaps, but we're talking about the nasty politics (in this case, the gossip and backbiting kind) so what of the powerful and connected teacher whose students always seem to pass? Is he really such a good teacher?

Perhaps.

You can fill in more of these cases as you wish, but to return to my own case, perhaps I was indeed passed to my current rank not for a plane ticket, but in a related way, because I am a major organizer and a "founding figure" in my local organization rather than because I am of 7dan quality. Is that really a problem? Perhaps you know people who you suspect were similarly favoured for their efforts rather than their skill. Think seriously about what they do, does their "unearned" rank damage the organization?

Now, if I did think it was a problem, and if I felt my rank was granted for something other than my skills at iai, I would still not offer to give my rank back. My teachers put me forward and other teachers felt I should have the rank, is it my place to second guess them?

Rank and Gradings under the FIK structure

Grades are awarded within each country and recognized across FIK member countries. The assumption of that recognition is that grades should be equivalent, so the solution is to train the judging panels in and outside Japan so that everyone who sits a panel understands the grading qualifications. Having undertaken many judging seminars I see the merit of this and absolutely support the efforts. The second part of "the solution" (there appears to be a belief that there is a problem) however, is to become extremely strict on the makeup of grading panels outside Japan. This, frankly, I don't agree with. The result will be to damp down grading advancement outside Japan dramatically, not because there is a lack of skill in the membership, but because of an inability to assemble a grading panel. I fully agree that those outside Japan are capable of the same skill as those within. I also agree that judging panels worldwide should be looking at the same minimum standards for rank, but policy changes in the last few years and some that are rumoured to be coming have made the existence of any panel at all much more difficult.

That means the arts will begin to shrink as those at the top retire or die off and are not replaced. The rank structure will collapse or be replaced by something else (which is, in fact what the extended kyu grades are currently doing).

Here I would like to suggest the problem outside Japan is not lack of equivalence in each rank, rather it's a lack of rank. Rules designed for a country with a full rank structure are not a good fit for a country with no higher ranks at all. There is some difference between FIK and ZNKR rules for gradings, but the FIK rules are being tightened rapidly and it will slow progress and growth outside Japan.

Before going into my next suggestion, perhaps I should again point out my attitude to my own perhaps dubious rank, and my unconcern about it. I suggest that a "recognized grade" need not mean one that is equivalent. If a 7dan from the West is not equivalent to a 7dan from Japan (and ask any Westerner (or Japanese) if any Western grade is equivalent...) what is the harm? That Western 7dan is not likely to move to Japan and teach or sit grading panels, so there is no danger of dragging Japanese iai down. Having a rank that is too high for your skill level is a disadvantage to tournament competition rather than an advantage, so again, where is the harm? Could we not just assume that the higher ranks in any country other than Japan (where higher ranks abound) are somewhat political? That the higher ranks are those who are leaders, who are teachers, who are doing the job nobody else before them did?

This is of course, not a comfortable idea for those inside or outside Japan so perhaps we could instead move to a class or range consideration rather than an absolute criteria? If a person of a certain rank would be somewhere above the worst person of that rank in Japan, could we not say "good enough"? If that is the case, and here we return to the real problem, could we not lighten up on the judging panel requirements somewhat if the results do not stray outside the range in Japan?

Structures

Kendo World 2013

Welcome to the newly reformulated Kendo World website. This column will deal with topics concerning Iaido and Jodo, those two "other" arts in the Kendo Federation. What they are, and why they are in the Federation we will leave for now, it's likely of more use at the beginning to work out the mechanics of how these arts integrate with Kendo. Any organization can be defined as its structure so let's look at the layout of our Kendo Federations. In other words, who is in charge and where do my fees go?

In most countries you will find an administration consisting of a President and some executive members, typically a Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary at a minimum. These folks will often be under the direction and control of a board of directors, which is the legally required structure of a company, and sports organizations which incorporate as a national body, are usually required to look like companies. This will be the group that collects membership fees (which invariably define membership), keeps track of that membership and issues the grading certificates. It is this group that interacts with the government of the country, making sure that laws are followed and money is tracked. This group also talks with the International Kendo Federation (the FIK), usually at a president to president level.

The FIK is a "horizontal" organization, with each country connected directly, rather than through another country. Below the national level can be regional (state/provincial/prefectural) organizations but their international connection is through a single body representing the country.

Those who practice other martial arts such as Aikido or Karate may be shaking their heads at the moment, not quite understanding a single national organization, but the FIK has created and maintained this structure due to the world championships of Kendo. A single national organization (which puts forward a single national team) is mandated by the FIK and while some exceptions to this rule have cropped up, the rule is eventually enforced.

The FIK then, deals with the world Kendo championships, membership in the FIK, and the issuing of standard guidelines for grading which supports the cross-recognition of rank between countries. Each country pays a membership fee based on its population, and so the monetary support comes overwhelmingly from Japan. The FIK is itself affiliated with other sports bodies through Sportaccord, an organization that is recognized and affiliated with the International Olympic movement, but this has little interest to the "rank and file".

Back at the national level, each country has, or is allowed, the three arts of Kendo, Iaido and Jodo. These are usually organized into an instructional side which may be integrated to various degrees with the administrative side. While the admin side may be voted in by the membership (if required under the national laws of incorporation), the instructional sections will almost inevitably be hierarchical and based on the rank/seniority system we are all familiar with through our gradings. Speaking of gradings, these are issued by each country, not by Japan, nor are ranks registered in Japan as in some martial arts. Membership in the FIK includes recognition of grades from other countries.

It is this instructional side which most students will interact with on a daily basis, the administration being noticed perhaps no more than once a year at registration time, and when grading fees are due.

There is no particular mixing of duties between administration and instruction beyond specific funding programs for teaching, or gradings and tournaments. That is not to say that instructional sections do not manage money. The majority of funding raised is for instruction, the renting of rooms, the purchase of equipment, travel to tournaments and much more. These are the day to day running funds of the organization and are generally not considered part of the administration so members will pay their local/dojo, regional and national dues and also kick in for equipment, travel and other expenses as needed.

To recap: The FIK is an international organization for Kendo, Iaido and Jodo. The members of the FIK are the various national bodies, including the All Japan Kendo Federation, which pay membership fees and participate on behalf of their memberships. While every nation is "equal" in the FIK, the influence of Japan, whose membership dwarfs the rest of the world, is of course, large.

The national members of the FIK (your country) may have dojo and/or members who practice any of the three arts, and anyone who wishes to participate in the world championships of Kendo must be a member of one of these national organizations. Iaido and Jodo, with no international championships, are much less dominated by the FIK or the national Kendo organizations and so not all iaido or jodo students in your country will be members of the Kendo Federation.

National Kendo organizations will have a small administrative group which will collect membership fees and register grades, and a larger instructional group which will teach and coach the arts. This instructional group will also collect fees from you and spend them for your education.

This takes care of the money and where it goes. Let's look more specifically at Iaido and Jodo and just what it is that the Kendo Federation administers.

In a word, "seitei". The FIK and its members provide instruction, ranking and competitions in the ZenKenRen iai and ZenKenRen jo sets that are usually called "Seitei". To be very specific, we're talking about the two sets of 12 kata which were developed within and belong to the Kendo Federation.

The FIK has nothing to say about the koryu (old school) arts of iai, jo or the kenjutsu arts from which kendo came. That is not to say that these koryu are not practised and taught by sensei who are also members of the Federation, but that the Federation itself does not administer or claim these arts. The koryu arts are organized (or not), tested (or not) and certified (or not) outside the Kendo Federations.

Of course, life is not really so simple as all that, and the Kendo Federation recognizes that its iai and jo practices come from somewhere (the koryu) so at some levels of testing a koryu kata or two may be required as part of a grading test, but the rank granted is "in seitei" and not a certification of that koryu.

I will speak more about the place of koryu in the Federation another time, please just understand for now that the iaido and jodo of the Kendo Federation is quite similar in intent, flavour and underlying principles, to the kendo no kata. While the Federation provides separate certification in its iai and jo arts, it folds the kendo no kata into the grading system for kendo. This separate certification has quite powerful effects on the structure of the Federation because it creates three instructional sections, one for each of iaido and jodo along with the sections for kendo. That means there will be three heads of section, three standards of instruction and grading and three sets of students who will cross train in the arts to various levels.

I hope this will give you a rough idea of the structure of the Kendo Federation from the international to the local level.

Iaido and Jodo in the Kendo Federation

Kendo World 2013

What is the position of Iaido and Jodo in the Federation? Why are they here?

From the Kendo point of view, these arts are present to make better kendoka. If you read the early statements about the inclusion of iaido, you will see phrases like "Iaido and Kendo are two wheels of a cart". Of course shiai and kendo no kata are also two wheels of a cart and eventually I think we might be referring to an 18-wheeler, but never mind.

Historically, the formal union of the three arts extends back to the late 1960s and the facts and figures are not hard to find online so I won't repeat them here. Some of the top kendo instructors at that time also practised Iai or Jo, so a historical connection between the arts existed, but why put them into the same organization? After all the All Japan Iaido Federation (ZNIR) was already in existence when Iaido was included in the Kendo Federation, so why not separate Federations?

I strongly suspect that other than the official reason of improving kendo, there were reasons of convenience (who wants to administer multiple organizations when one will do), history (the pre-war Dai Nippon Butokukai was a multi-art national organization) and self-interest (lets face it, kendo is a huge pool of potential students for the other two arts, which are well-sheltered within the Federation).

Any student in the Kendo Federation may practice any of the three arts, and three similar but separate grading streams exist. A rank in one art, while respected, is not recognized as certification in the others.

The situation today, especially outside of Japan, is somewhat changed from 1968. In many countries, anyone who wishes to study iaido or jodo will find the local Kendo Federation is the most convenient choice. Many countries are finding a growing number of members practice iai or jo only, and when I last had access to the financials of my own country, the absence of iai and jo would have resulted in a 20% decrease in yearly revenue. As the arts become better known in an area, participation of the iai and jo sections in the Kendo Federation becomes more of a choice and less of a necessity.

ZKRI

The Zen Ken Ren Iai (seitei iai) was formed as a "common language" amongst several koryu lines, to be used in grading and tournaments. While it was originally formed from several koryu it has, in the last 45 years, become a unified practice in its own right. Of the koryu sources for Seitei, the dominant influence was the Muso Shinden / Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu lineage but you will see elements of other schools in specific kata.

The grading system in the iaido section moves, at a minimum, from first kyu through shodan to hachidan and has a shogo system of renshi, kyoshi, hanshi overlaid on the top three dan levels. Grading usually consists of a written test and demonstration of 5 kata which are selected from any of the 12 seitei kata and may include koryu as well. At the 8dan level there are two practical exams, the first of 7 seitei kata and if that is passed, a second of 7 koryu kata. In this way the Kendo Federation shows support for the koryu while not actually providing certification.

Instructors in the iaido section are certified through the Kendo Federation and teach the ZKRJ kata to their students in order for them to grade. Many instructors also teach a koryu, but this instruction, as mentioned before, is somewhat inside and outside the Federation. At a minimum, students who require a koryu kata to grade, must obtain instruction in one or two koryu kata, but the implied meaning is that all iai students should also study the koryu.

ZKRJ

The Kendo Federation jo practice is organized in a very similar way to the iaido section, with the same grading system. The seitei kata are all taken from a single koryu, the Shindo Muso Ryu and gradings in most areas tend to be done by "rolling through" the set. By that I mean that lower dan levels tend to use the first few kata of the set and the upper levels use the later kata. As a result, instructors may teach the set in a graduated way as well, introducing them as needed for the next test.

If a jo koryu is taught, it is almost inevitably the Shindo Muso Ryu. In the past, koryu kata have been required for gradings, but in recent years this has been changing to an all-seitei format and the 8dan exam is now two sections, both using seitei. I will not speculate why these changes have been put in place, but even in Japan jo is by far the smallest of the three arts, the existence of koryu instructors is not common.

Jo practice also includes two sets of kihon, basic movement training, one solo and one with a partner. These can be compared to the kendo bokuto waza practice in that they are to teach fundamental motions.

Kendo Federation Sword Practices.

In the Kendo Federation then, we find the following types of practice: Kendo Bokuto Waza, Kendo no Kata, Shiai Kendo, ZKR iai kata, ZKR jo kata, jodo solo practice and jodo partner practice. These are all regulated by the Federation.

In addition it is not unusual to find iai and jo koryu lines in some dojo and even kenjutsu koryu such as Itto ryu. These are not regulated by the Federation but they could be considered adjunct arts which may even contain students who are not registered in the Kendo Federation, depending on specific instructors who may allow koryu only students.

===== end =====

Koryu and Seitei

Kendo World 2013

Is there anything in the Kendo Iai or Jo world more discussed than the difference between koryu and seitei? Even people who are not in the Federation discuss the differences, so why not have one more go at it.

We should get the definition out of the way first. Koryu means old school, but just how old is old? A popular dividing date is the Meiji Restoration, 1868, and that's the one I tend to use. 1868 is 145 years ago, a good long time, but more importantly, it stretches back to the age of the samurai, so we can add "samurai era" to the age and come up with "old school". (For fun, take a few moments and look up the start date of Kendo).

Standard vs New

Kendo Federation iai and jo have been around for about 45 years so unless we define koryu as "any art that started before 50% of its practitioners were born".... no it would probably still not work. Kendo Federation iai and Kendo Federation jo (seitei) are, as sets of practice, pretty new, but were they invented whole to be introduced in 1968? While some may think so, the seitei kata come from older forms. They were not so much "invented" as "standardized" by a committee whose members were pretty experienced koryu people themselves. They would have no need to invent new kata, they had plenty of pre-existing material to work with. Let's understand this clearly, we call the Zen Ken Ren iai and jo kata sets "seitei" and not "atarashii", they are "standard" not "new". What the originating sensei needed most was not a set of new kata, but wide agreement to teach and use agreed upon methods of performing existing kata.

This standardization is easily understood in jo, with the seitei kata being very close to Shindo Muso Ryu kata. On the iai side, with multiple koryu arts being involved, there are one or two "new" kata for any student of koryu starting the seitei set.

It's time to look back at your research into kendo, hard to say when "kendo" started isn't it? While everyone will agree that Kendo is a modern thing, it didn't spring up fully created in one instant, there was a movement from the old schools to the modern art that happened over generations. Equipment developed, rules changed but the initial idea of a full-contact practice easily stretches back to the age of koryu. We should think the same way about seitei iai and jo, not so much a couple of brand new schools, but rather a specialized practice in the same tradition from the same sensei.

To this day members of the iai and jo committees in Japan are working on a standardized way of practice and getting that standard out to the rest of the membership. Why standardize? Gradings and tournaments are difficult otherwise. For those of us in the west there are additional benefits. In areas where high ranked instructors are scarce, it is nice to have a set of kata that allow any sensei to teach any group. This doesn't happen in the koryu, where the lineage is at least as important as the technique. A koryu sensei would only teach another sensei's students under very rare circumstances.

Where is the underlying principle of this standardization of older kata you might ask? Good question, and it is easily answered if you remember that the seitei were developed within and for the Kendo Federation. To find the roots, look to Kendo and especially to the Kendo no Kata. Why would it be any other way?

The Koryu

And the Koryu? What are they in comparison? They are older, usually of larger syllabus, much more reliant on a lineage of teacher to student than agreed-upon technical standards. Some koryu perform kata which are much different than seitei, some are very close, but all koryu is filtered through the individual sensei's understanding of the art. It is this variation and of course, courtesy, that prevents one koryu sensei from teaching the students of another.

In any dojo, most especially in the west, a beginner might get started on seitei gata because that's where they will grade, and that's where most of the instruction from visiting senior sensei is available to the local instructor. Once the student has been around for a while they may get introduced to the koryu. In a way, this is unfortunate since that's not how seitei was developed historically, and that's why it isn't a very good introduction to the arts, especially in Iai. Seitei is representative, not introductory, it covers an entire artform in 12 kata where a koryu might introduce the same material over 50 or 60 kata in multiple sets.

Contamination?

Because students start with seitei, the technical points become the baseline for the student. When they start learning a koryu their practice may be called "contaminated" with seitei. This criticism seems a bit unjustified as the student will probably be taught both arts by the same sensei who would teach his koryu as he sees fit. A beginner to koryu who has never seen seitei will also be moving in ways "contaminated" by whatever sport or skill they have learned previously. The charges of koryu "contamination" by seitei should always be directed to the top sensei in the Kendo Federation who are the ones that set the style for their line of koryu. Beginners are blameless for taking their prior understanding to new material.

Of course the very idea of a continuing standardization of seitei by the committees means that the more important contamination always moves from koryu to seitei, from individual interpretation of a standardized practice. Far from being a problem, it is this very distinction that defines for us the difference between seitei and koryu.

What are You doing to save Kendo

Kendo World 2013

And iaido and jodo and any of the koryu you do.

Seriously, what are you doing to promote the art, to preserve it for the next generation? Here's a list of ideas, tick off the ones you do to find out what kind of budo bunny you are.

1. Go to practice. Not just now and then, not just a couple times a week, but every single practice your sensei holds, and then some practices on your own where you do your homework to reinforce what sensei taught you last class. 60 points for yes, 5 for sometimes, 1 for "was there last month".
2. Evangelize. If you mention to your girlfriend that you are going to practice if that's OK with her: 1 point. If you tell your friends you do kendo: 3 points, If you go online and scream in full caps about the life-changing benefits of iaido at least four times a day: 5 points. If you bodily drag your friends and your girlfriend to your next jodo class: 20 points.
3. Teach. Have you told your partner that his jo is a bit low? (And you are right): 1 point. Have you shown your friends the cool move you learned last class? 3 points. Have you started teaching in your local YMCA: 5 points. With permission?: 20 points. Have you started your own dojo and joined it to your teacher's organization and still go to class with your teacher regularly?: 50 points.
4. Support. Do you pay your dojo dues regularly and on time?: 3 points. Clean the floors and windows when they need it: 5 points. Buy supplies and forget to be reimbursed: 8 points. Clean the bathroom and showers without being ordered to do it: 10 points. Go to every seminar anywhere, and drive a car full of beginners as well as pay for three of them because they can't afford it: 50 points.
5. Pay it forward. Do you make notes after every class?: 5 points. Do you videotape every class, with or without sensei's permission? 10 points. Do you edit and collect your notes and/or videos and share them: 15 points. Make sure they are copied and stored where future generations of students in your line can find them and use them: 30 points.

0-10 points: Miggles on the grass

11-30 points: Easter bunny

31-40 points: Lucky rabbit's foot

41-100 points: Snowshoe Hare

12 years of sword in Guelph

Sports Express, May 2002

This spring, for the 12th year in a row, the University of Guelph will play host to several of the highest ranking sword and staff instructors from Japan. The Guelph Spring Seminar is one of the largest events of its kind, with more than 100 students from all over North America and from as far away as South Africa, Europe and Russia coming to practice the martial arts of iaido and jodo with some of the best instructors anywhere. There will be 2 eighth dan instructors of iaido and jodo, as well as 4 seventh dan holders from Japan. Joining them are 4 sixth dan holders from Canada and the USA, all in the same room with one thing in mind, to provide the best instruction available anywhere, including Japan.

For those who may not know, iaido is the art of drawing and cutting in one motion with the sword, it is a solo art that is done with a real sword (a wooden sword for beginners of course), allowing the student to work on posture, poise and power. Jodo, on the other hand, is the art of the four foot staff. It is practised against a partner armed with a wooden sword, through a series of basic exercises and partner kata. Students learn about timing, distance and focus as well as how to manipulate the staff without allowing even the smallest opening for an attack. Both of these arts are excellent complements to other martial arts and sports.

The seminar is actually two events this year, with iaido being taught May 18 to 20 from 9am to 5pm in the Athletics Centre, University of Guelph. The jodo seminar is May 21 to 23 from noon to 8pm to allow those who are working to attend the second half of each day. Single day registrations are also fine. Beginners are welcome at the seminar and several people who have never used weapons before attend each year. More information on registration can be obtained from Kim Taylor at 519-836-4357 or on the web at: <https://seidokai.ca/iai.seminar.html> Equipment can be borrowed for the event, and no special uniform is required. Students from any organization are welcome, the seminar has never been restricted, although gradings are held for those in the Canadian Kendo Federation only.

It has been remarked several times in past years that the combination of instructors at this seminar is rare, in fact it is almost impossible to get these teachers together in Japan, and if they were all teaching in one place it would be likely that the seminar would be restricted to high ranked students. We are indeed fortunate to have such talent here in Canada each year. The two arts are both governed by the International Kendo Federation and the highest rank given out by that federation is 8dan, so with 10 instructors from 6 to 8dan available to 100 students, the teacher/student ratio is incredible.

Visiting for the first time this year are the mother and daughter team of Tomoko and Eiko Eto. These women hold high rank in several martial arts as well as 7dans in iaido and jodo, and they run their own dojo in Japan. For those women in the martial arts who want to know just how far you can go with determination and drive, practising with these instructors is recommended.

If you want to attend the seminar, you can pre-register or sign up at the door (although this is more expensive). For those too far away to drive each day, the University has hostel accommodation available at very reasonable prices just across the road from the Gym.

Samurai Invasion 2008

Traditional "old school" (koryu) arts from Japan are often hard to find when looking for a martial art to practice. At least once a year for the last two decades this has not been a problem in our region as a group of modern day "samurai" come to the University of Guelph each Victoria Day weekend to teach the arts of the sword and the stick.

This year there will be eight high ranking instructors from Japan, who will be teaching the art of the sword (iaido) and the art of the short staff (jodo) to over 100 students from all over North America. The University of Guelph iai and jodo club, the Seidokai, has organized the seminar since 1991, four years after the club was founded to teach iaido.



The seminar teaches students of all ranks, from beginner to the top ranked people in Canada. Last year Pamela Morgan from Waterloo joined the seminar as a beginner, just to try it out, and this year she will be doing a grading in both iaido and jodo after joining the Seidokai to train.

Iaido is the art of drawing and cutting in the same motion with the sword. It is done as a solo practice and often with a real Japanese sword, although students begin with a wooden blade and move on to a dull aluminum replica which they use for many years before graduating to a sharp blade. There are four parts to an iaido technique, the draw and cut, the finishing cut or cuts, a symbolic cleaning of the blade, and then replacing it in the scabbard without looking. This is done with a quiet, calm mind and is a wonderful form of meditation.



Jodo is a partner practice where one person with a four foot staff faces an attacker armed with a wooden sword. By means of avoidance, deflections, strikes and controls the person with the staff learns to control the seemingly more dangerous swordsman. These techniques are all choreographed, as it would be much too dangerous to attempt "freestyle". Students of jodo must also have a calm mind and learn to control their actions to the millimetre.

The annual spring seminar gives the students who attend a chance to spend four days with top instructors from Japan and keeps them up to date with the current standards worldwide. The Seidokai is a member of the Canadian Kendo Federation which oversees iaido, jodo and kendo practice nationally and Kim Taylor, the Seidokai instructor is a member of the national grading panel for both arts, as well as head of the Jodo section. He also serves on the technical panel for the iaido section. The seminar will be held from May 16 to 19 and more information can be found on the club website at seidokai.ca

You will find more free ebooks on the <https://sdksupplies.com/> website, and more about the Seidokai at <https://seidokai.ca/>