

Taylor's laido

Curated by Lonita Fraser

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This collection of articles represent some of my thoughts on laido which were written down for various journals over many years. I would like to thank Lonita Fraser for compiling them. While I continue to teach and research, I suspect I've said much of what I am going to say, here.

-Kim Taylor

The old swordsman sits
deep in the woods
waiting for the spirit to come
Just there!
He cuts, cuts, and replaces the sword

You would have to be close
to hear him mutter
No, not that time

~~

Iaido from Seiza

2010

I notice this topic has once again reappeared on a discussion forum. I had my say on this 20 years ago in an article from "The Iaido Newsletter" and I will re-print that here, but I also have a little bit of new data for the consideration of the readers. The argument in several books over the years has been that the samurai never wore their long swords while indoors or sitting in seiza so that iaido when practised from seiza is a false and misleading practice.

In May 2009 I toured through Nijo castle in Kyoto and was amused to find an audience room recreation where mannequins were placed as in an audience before the lord. They were sitting in seiza and wearing katana. Perhaps the curators knew less about formal etiquette than we swordsmen-authors do? I won't speculate on that, but I certainly thought it was an interesting scene when thinking about the comments above.

Here is the photograph:



You will note those black things sticking out of the belt of the fellows on the far left, and in the yellow, orange and green outfits at the back.

I would have taken many photographs of my own of the scene but photography is forbidden in the castle, this is a photo I found online.

Here is the old article from Volume 2, #9 of TIN, 1990 I hope you enjoy this blast from the past.

THE OMORI RYU

The first techniques that a student of laido must learn in either the Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu or in the Muso Shinden Ryu are the Shoden waza. These are usually introduced as the Omori Ryu which invariably causes confusion; is it a set in the main school or is it a separate school in itself. As will be mentioned, it is both.

Since these kata are the first and quite often the only introduction people have to laido they have a great influence on what is thought of the art. Due to their unique nature they have perhaps given the art of lai-do a rather undeserved reputation. They have also influenced what type of student continues on in the art. When asked why they did not return after the first couple of classes, most people will say that they liked it but they didn't like all the kneeling. Does this mean that beginners should start with standing techniques? Perhaps, if one is seeking lots of students but it can be argued that this would do them no favours.

OMORI RYU HISTORY

The history of the Omori Ryu is linked with that of several schools including the Muso Ryu so the proper starting place is difficult to find. We will begin with the Muso Shinden/Jikiden line. The man credited with the origination of laido is Jinsuke Shigenobu (Hayashizuki) who lived around 1546-1621. He was thought to have been born in Sagami (Shoshu) and to have travelled to Mutsu where he studied the sword from 1596 to 1601. The sword drawing art he founded between 1601 and 1615 is usually termed Batto Jutsu. In 1616 he went on his second Musa Shugyo (dojo tour) at the age of 73 and never returned.

Shigenobu has been given the title of first headmaster of the Muso Jikiden\Shinden school. From his teachings several hundred schools of lai were developed, of which some 20 to 30 are still extant.

One of the names for Shigenobu's art is the Muso Ryu, "muso" here means dream or vision, reflecting the way in which he was inspired to create the techniques. The second headmaster was Tamiya Taira no Hyoe Narimasa, the founder of the Tamiya Ryu. Tamiya was an instructor to Ieyasu (1542-1616), Hidetada (1578-1632) and Iemitsu (1604-1651) the first three Tokugawa Shogun.

The seventh headmaster of the Muso Jikiden\Shinden line was a man named Hasagawa Chikaranosuke Eishin (b. approx. 1700). He studied under the sixth

headmaster, Nobusada Danuemon no Jo Banno (Manno Danueimon Nobumasa) in Edo during the Kyoho era (1716-1735).

Eishin transformed many of the techniques and is said to have devised the style of drawing with the blade edge up in the obi. He added the lai hiza techniques (Chudan level) to the Okuden levels of waza. It was Eishin who first used the name Muso Jikiden which had been the name of an earlier school of swordsmanship. The full name of the school came to be the Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu. In this case "muso" means matchless or unique. "jikiden" means transmitted directly, as from teacher to pupil. Eishin eventually left Edo and travelled to Tosa (Koshi) in Shikoku. Omori Rokurozaemon Masamitsu was a student of Eishin and was expelled from the Ryu at one time for personal reasons. Omori was a student of Ogasawara Ryu Reishiki or etiquette as well as the Yagyu Shinkage Ryu (Bishu) school of sword. The Yagyu Shinkage Ryu had a set of five lai techniques called the Saya-no-uchi Batto Gohan. Rokurozaemon developed a set of eleven lai techniques which were initiated from the formal seated posture called Seiza. For this innovation Eishin re-admitted him to the school.

Hayashi Rokudayu Morimasa (1661-1732) the ninth headmaster of Muso Ryu was a cook and pack horse driver for Yamanouchi Toyomasa, one of the daimyo at Edo. Hayashi studied Shinkage Itto Ryu (of the Mito Han) in Edo. He was also a student of Arai Setatsu Kiyonobu the eighth headmaster of what was named the Shinmei Muso Ryu at that time (Muso Shinden/Jikiden Ryu). Hayashi also studied Shinkage Ryu kenjutsu with Omori Masamitsu. When he became the ninth headmaster of the Muso Ryu he began to teach the Omori seiza lai as the Shoden Omori Ryu. Up to this point the Muso Ryu only contained techniques which began from lai-hiza (Kiza, one knee raised) and Tachi Ai (standing). This seiza set became the initiation to laido, "shoden" being broken down to "Sho", beginning and "den", initiation. Hayashi eventually returned to his home in Tosa, finally establishing the Muso Ryu in Shikoku.

Hayashi Morimasa taught Hayashi Yasudayu Seisho (Masataka) who became the tenth headmaster.

In turn, Hayashi Masataka taught Oguro Motoemon Kiyokatsu who became the eleventh headmaster. Oguro also studied the sword under Omori Masamitsu. Thus we can see that although Omori was never a headmaster of the Muso Ryu, he had a direct influence on the school, being an instructor to at least 2 headmasters. This relationship of Omori to Muso Ryu is shown in the chart below.

In the Taisho era (1912-1926) the 17th headmaster (Tanimura Ha), Oe Masamichi (Shikei) (1852-1927) reorganized the school and officially incorporated the Omori Ryu lai waza as the Shoden level. Shikei is the man who named the school the Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu and set its present three level system.

At the time of the 11th headmaster the school split into two lines, the Shimomura and the Tanimura. The Tanimura line became associated with the "common" folk, or the Goshi farmer/warriors while the Shimomura stayed closer to the Samurai classes. Both lines were still quite secretive about their teachings when a Kendo

expert named Nakayama Hakudo (1869-1958) studied under teachers from the two branches. Nakayama developed a style of lai which has become known as the Muso Shinden Ryu and which is centred around Tokyo. It is Nakayama who popularized the name laido which appeared in 1932. The Muso Jikiden Ryu has since become more open and remains situated mainly in the West and South of Japan. The "muso" in Muso Shinden means vision as it did in the original Muso Ryu of Shigenobu. These two contemporaries, Oe Masamichi and Nakayama Hakudo are largely responsible for the modern survival and growth of laido. The two schools teach similar techniques, the katas differing in interpretation more than in fundamentals. The Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu has 11 Omori Ryu techniques while the Muso Shinden Ryu has added one more for a total of twelve. The names used for the individual waza are different for each school. At the Chuden and Okuden levels of training both the names and the numbers of techniques are the same.

OTHER SCHOOLS DERIVED FROM OMORI RYU

The influence of the Omori Ryu was not confined to the Muso Ryu lineage, it also played a somewhat paradoxical role in the emergence of some modern lai-jutsu schools.

TOYAMA RYU

In 1873 the Rikugun Toyama Gakko was set up as an army training school. The school included instruction in the sword and in 1925 the Toyama Ryu Gunto Soho was defined. The gunto being the later army sword that was of katana design and mounted somewhat like the old tachi, suspended from the belt instead of tucked through an obi. Teaching at the Toyama Gakko were Kenshi skilled in the Omori Ryu. These instructors developed a set of seven laido techniques for the gunto which were performed from the standing position.

NAKAMURA RYU

Nakamura Taisaburo (b.1911) studied the Toyama Ryu Gunto Soho and is one of the leading authorities on the school. He has gone on to create the Nakamura Ryu and has defined Batto Jutsu as the essential element. Nakamura has eliminated the seiza position saying that it is not practical. He has also stressed the importance of tameshigiri practice. From the standing laido of Hasagawa Eishin to the origin of Omori Ryu as a school incorporating seiza and reishiki, to the modern laijutsu of Nakamura which rejects the seiza position we have come full circle.

MODERN OMORI RYU PRACTICE

The Omori Ryu as it is practised in the Muso Ryu is a highly formal set practised for the most part from seiza. Great stress is placed on precise physical and mental form. The set is as much about reishiki as it is about laido, but since budo begins and ends with reishiki, this is probably not a problem.

But why learn Omori first, what was the reasoning behind this choice instead of, say, a set of standing techniques. After all the standing techniques are easier to

learn, and they are "practical". Anyone seeing them would not be tempted to say that lai-do was less "combat real" than lai-jutsu. It probably isn't hard to reason why the lai-hiza position is not used as the starting point. The pains in the left leg would just about guarantee that nobody would learn the proper techniques simply because of the distraction. What should probably be resisted however, is the temptation to say that since the Japanese student was used to sitting in seiza, it was a good starting point because it was familiar. Standing is even more familiar, and the position from which the sword is most likely to be drawn. Even if we accept Omori as the starting position, why would Nakayama Hakudo and Oe Masamichi then choose lai-hiza techniques for the chuden waza. The very last techniques we learn are the easiest.

Are they the easiest though? Surely the headmasters of the Muso Ryu from Hayashi Morimasa onward had some reason for making Omori Ryu the shoden level. Lets assume they knew better than we and try to find some reasons.

The most striking (ha ha) thing about Omori is that a lot of the cuts are done from a kneeling position. This is handy because it doesn't allow the student to swing too far before the blade hits the floor. It removes the need to teach the student not to finish the cuts too low. Without being shown or told, the student discovers shibori and te-no-uchi, or at least discovers the need for them.

Kneeling also removes three out of seven joints from consideration while learning how to cut. This wisdom of this becomes apparent when you try to teach a beginner how to cut from a standing position. Tell a beginner to make a big cut keeping the hips low and the back straight. It won't happen. Now put the student on one knee and just ask for a big cut. The hips stay down since the toes, ankles and knees are not available to push them up. The back stays straight since if it moves the kneecap is likely to grind around on the floor. The hips stay square to the cut for the same reason. The student has only the shoulders and arms to swing with allowing you to concentrate on them.

The seiza position itself is useful. The saya must be properly controlled or it hits the floor. The back can be kept straight since only one joint (hip) is involved in letting it bend. Nuki tsuke is simplified with only one possible orientation of the hips (forward). Spiritually, the student begins and finishes in the most humble possible position, one that is close to the floor. The position is vulnerable to attack and therefore can't be aggressive as can kiza or tachi ai. Moving up to a standing position from seiza requires great leg strength, giving the student a good root into the ground. Sitting solidly in seiza allows the student to know what that root should feel like while standing.

The list of benefits is long, think about all the instruction you have ever received in lai, almost all of it can be examined in the Omori Ryu.

Omori is shoden, it is the teaching set. It is the place where we learn to walk, later we run. Counting the partner practices, the Muso Jikiden Ryu contains somewhere around 60 kata in total. The average person could probably memorize that many movements in a month so the object of laido must not be how many techniques we

can memorize. The point is to perform one technique perfectly at the proper moment. For that you need only one technique but you need to be able to do it properly. The argument is the old one of quality vs. quantity. To do laido you must know how to cut, Omori Ryu teaches you. To do laido you must know how to carry your sword, Omori Ryu teaches you. Patience, perseverance, perspective, perception, perspiration and all the other P words of practice (yes, even pain) are taught in Omori Ryu. It is shoden, as important as your first breath of air.

Malcolm Shewan, in his book on Muso Shinden Omori describes the kata as idealized and often impractical movements which are not meant to be battlefield maneuvers. Instead they are a matrix within which we can re-live the experience of the man who created the kata. Omori is a complete set and we should look at it as such, seeing the underlying principles of the whole. The set is not "beginner's stuff", if we could perform a perfect Mae (Shohatto) we would achieve the perfection of lai.

THE OBJECTIONS TO IAI-DO AND THE RELATIONSHIP TO IAI-JUTSU

As was mentioned earlier, the fact that Muso Ryu begins with Shoden Omori has often created the impression that lai-do is something overly concerned with form and etiquette, having nothing to do with "real" lai-jutsu. This is rather like watching someone hit a tennis ball against a wall and then saying the game is silly since the wall doesn't hit the ball back. Some of the comments on laido published over the last few years are informative.

Otake Ritsuke describes modern laido as being too fast on the noto, this is an affectation for show only and is dangerous. Iaijutsu instead emphasizes a fast draw and cut (haya waza) which is more realistic and practical.

Omori Ryu has a slow noto, but also a slow nuki tsuke. Both are slow to teach proper form. Chuden and Okuden contain haya nuki, fast draws, but even here, fast is not attempted until the draw is smooth.

Nakamura Taisaburo has several comments on lai-do, claiming it is not practical or realistic. The comments are found in Draeger's Martial Arts and Ways of Japan.

1. Seiza was not a position the classical warrior would adopt, it cannot be done with the daisho (two swords).

The classical warrior was as likely to be wearing a tachi and a tanto as the daisho which was not popular until the Edo period. The shin-to or katana was not introduced until the middle 1500s and the matched daisho style was developed much later. The very warriors that would have carried and used the daisho, the Tokugawa era samurai, were those who developed and adopted the Omori Ryu. The upper levels of Muso Ryu laido begin from the "battlefield" positions.

2. The nuki tsuke of lai-do is too slow, it exposes a suki (opening).

This is doubtless true for the beginner practising Omori Ryu, but a beginner is almost by definition exposing suki most of the time. This would not change whether a slow or a fast nuki was being attempted. For the expert the draw can be slow or fast, the opening will not be there. As with most martial endeavours, speed is not as

important is proper timing. If speed were all that was needed the heavyweight boxing crown would be held by a flyweight. The nuki tsuke of the Muso Ryu can be very fast in the upper levels of practice.

3. The kiri tsuke of the lai-do student is weak since they lack experience with tameshi-giri (cutting practice).

To be flippant, there is no law that prohibits laidoists from obtaining straw while allowing laijutsuists to use it.

Tameshigiri can be practised by anyone. When you begin practising however, you have a better chance of succeeding if you have been taught the proper mechanics of cutting. A great way to learn this is by practising Omori Ryu as was pointed out above.

4. The chiburi of lai-do is not practical, only by wiping the blade on a cloth or a piece of paper would the blade be clean enough to return to the scabbard.

This is true. The lai-jutsu of the Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu has a chiburi that consists of spinning the blade and then hitting the tsuka with a fist. The Toyama Ryu lai-jutsu uses the exact same circular chiburi as does Omori Ryu. The chiburi "represented" by these motions would not be performed by the swordsmen involved after actually cutting someone or something. An laido exponent would doubtless use a cloth too.

5. The noto of lai-do is too fast and is used only for show, the noto of the classical warrior is slow and demonstrates zanshin (lingering heart, awareness).

The student of laido had better demonstrate zanshin or the instructor will soon show its usefulness. As to the quick noto, it might be argued (by me only) that one should be ready for further attacks after finishing one opponent. One man thoroughly dead at your feet doesn't mean that all potential enemies are dead. By taking a long time to do noto you are leaving a suki of the same sort that is left with a slow nuki tsuke. In any case, fast or slow, drawing or sheathing you must be ready to change according to the circumstances. That is fudoshin.

6. The manners and customs of modern lai-do students are careless. Most of them have a koiguchi that is chipped and scratched.

All beginners have a saya that is chiselled, nobody starts out perfect. Omori Ryu is a school that contains major influences from the Ogasawara Ryu Reishiki. Omori is a school of the manners and customs of the sword. It is also a school where the slow nuki tsuke is done, allowing the student to learn how not to scratch the koiguchi. A poor student of Omori Ryu will have poor manners but that is no fault of laido itself.

Nakamura goes on to say that modern practice should be a balance of old and new but the showmanship, sport and competition aspects should be discarded. The link between Kendo and laido should be recognized, the shinai is not a sword.

Obata Toshishiro in his book *Crimson Steel* states, "the Samurai never wore his long sword when seated because it was not worn into the house, yet 'laido' as the new

sword drawing art was termed taught many sword drawing methods from the formal seated 'seiza' position."

The samurai did wear his long sword when seated. He wore it when he practised Omori Ryu lai. At the time the art might have been termed Batto-jutsu, lai-jutsu or some other name but since the term laido did not become popular until the 1930s and since the common people in the Edo period did not practice swordsmanship, the 'Samurai' most certainly practised lai-'jutsu' from 'seiza'.

Reid and Croucher in *The Way of the Warrior* have this to say. "When it is well performed laido is a beautiful, almost balletic use of the sword, but it bears little relation to the speed, poise and concentration of the art of lai-jutsu. The combat value of studying laido, especially with a blunt sword, is almost nil, but on the other hand the aim of the adept in this way is spiritual and bodily harmony and growth, not killing power."

If one needs killing power to have speed, poise and concentration, perhaps one should practice with automatic rifles instead of these horridly inefficient blunt swords.

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Push and Pull: The Importance of Language in Iaido

2007

Language is important. The words we use in our heads when practising Iaido are important. Instructors and students may not realize just how important they are, but here's a small example of how carefully we should pick our words.

Beginners are likely to say that we pull the sword out of the scabbard, and we push it back in.

Sounds right? Ok here's the experiment, go and say to yourself, or tell some beginners to pull the sword out of the saya (nuki tsuke), and watch carefully what happens. Now tell them to push the sword out. See any difference?



Take a look below and see if this is what you discovered.

Nuki Tsuke, pulling the blade out of the scabbard



Nuki Tsuke, pushing the blade out



There may not be too much difference in these two draws, but the results of each are drastically different.

In the first case, the pull, the final position of nuki tsuke shows how the grip comes naturally onto the side of the tsuka (hilt) and this results in a broken wrist, and an elbow that humps upward in a chicken-wing effect. The shoulder is lifted, which you can also see in the second shot above as Nate Bain pulls the blade out. In fact, if you look closely, that shoulder is starting to rise as he grips the hilt in the first shot.



Here, when Nate has pushed the blade out of the saya we see that the hand naturally falls onto the tsuka in a position which allows the wrist, arm and shoulder to remain down, providing a powerful anchor for the horizontal cut.

To try and get this final position, sensei may be saying to you, drop your shoulder, roll the hilt further over, adjust your right hand, tighten your right little finger, straighten your arm... and on and on. You might try thinking "push the sword out" rather than "pull it out".

The next two shots are closeups of the second position above, these shots explain a little more clearly why the final hand position results from pulling or pushing.

Here Nate has gripped the hilt to pull the blade from the scabbard. When we pull something we grip it, wrap all our fingers around it, and pull with the little finger edge of our hand.

However, when we push something we don't close our hands, but open them up and use the palm or the fingertips. Since the palm can't work we use the fingertips to push the blade out and from here, when the blade rolls over, it will fall naturally into our proper grip.

Notice that the tsuba is touching Nate's hand. This will also happen on the noto, when we "pull" the blade back into the scabbard and we'll talk about that below.

To pull, we bend the elbow, to push, we keep the elbow straight and put our body into it. Pushing the blade out therefore keeps our elbows close to the hips and down. You can see this very clearly if you compare the side views.



This same push and pull language will affect the cut. It's hard to see what effect it has, but take a look at the next set of shots.

Cutting with a pull of the left hand

Cutting with a push from the right hand



Cutting with a pull from the left hand (next page)



Again, a close look will reveal that the two motions are not the same. With the pull, the elbows stay forward at the beginning, and the hips stay under the cut. When Dennis thinks about pushing he rocks the index finger of the right hand onto the hilt, this causes his elbows to fly outward, and his shoulders to come up and forward as his weight rocks upward onto the top of the sword. Of course this simply results in less weight being transferred into the tip, and a weak cut. It also results in stiff shoulders which can be seen if you compare the third photo of each sequence.

Finally, we come to noto, or putting the blade back into the scabbard. Again, we need to reverse our usual word association. Instead of pushing the blade back into the saya, we should pull it back in.

Noto while thinking of pushing the blade into the scabbard



Noto, pulling the blade back into the scabbard.



And just because I took the shots, from the front.

Noto while thinking of pushing the blade into the scabbard



Noto, pulling the blade back into the scabbard.



As we can see, the pushing idea on noto means that the shoulder stays up, and the hand grips the side of the tsuka. Not an ideal situation, especially if one has to draw quickly once more. Just as one has to push the blade out of the scabbard, one has to pull it back in. The pull is accomplished by a light fingertip grip on the tsuka, and by contact with the tsuba by the back of the right hand as is seen in the closeup shot way up above.

Finally, just in case anyone is confused, here are four shots labelled Right and Wrong. The "Right" positions happen when you push the tsuka out of the saya and the "Wrong" positions happen when you pull the sword out of the scabbard and push it back in.

Wrong



Right



Thanks to Nate Bain and Dennis Nikitenko for modeling.

Iaido and the New Age

This article was originally published in the May 1991 issue of The Iaido Newsletter. The complete back issues of this journal are now available at [SDKsupplies](#).

Yes, I realize that Iaido has been practised for about four hundred years longer than there has been a "New Age" but the pre-existence of a technique has never prevented it from becoming New Age. Iaido is ripe for inclusion on the bookshelves, right between Crystals and Jungian therapy.

We can all agree that Iaido is not practised for self defence, unless of course, we fall through the alternate universe interface (AUI) and end up cast as the hero in a fantasy novel. Like all the other Budo, once the initial training is over, the next 20 years participation has to be undertaken for some reason other than the off chance you will get into a barroom fight. Just what that reason is, is seldom if ever discussed. There are good reasons for this but I will ignore them since if I didn't this article would be pretty short. There is no actual need to know any of what is discussed from now on in order to obtain the benefits of Iai; if you have something that needs to be done around the house go do it.

So what is it that makes Iaido a candidate for the Channelling to Tarot shelf.

BODYWORK

Iaido is, in actual fact, what the New Ager would call bodywork. It is a means of using the body to bring the mind and reality into closer agreement. To put it another way, it is a method used to learn how to live in (through) your body. The name (Iai) itself refers to your position with regard to your body stance, and by extension your position in the universe. By stressing correct and precise body alignment to transfer maximum power from the ground through the sword you train the mind to regard yourself as connected to the world. You are not something that acts on and is acted on by something outside the bag of skin we erroneously call our self. While connecting the body to the dojo and to the sword we are, at the same time, reconnecting the mind to the body. When facing an oncoming sword there is no time to deal with an information interface at the eyes and then another one wherever the "body" meets the "mind". Without having the opponent included in your "mind" there is a gap which, to give it the technical name, is a *suki*. This weak point is the opportunity for your opponent to break your defence.

When performing kata your mind must be totally diffused through your body. When you focus your attention on one thing you create the illusion of a mind/body split since "there is the mind" (attention) and "there is the body" (angle of the right hand perhaps). Try performing a kata with the attention fixed (*fushin*) on one point and the whole thing falls apart. If you practice like this the subroutines for playing volleyball may get triggered while you're not looking and you start leaping to your feet or something equally embarrassing. The only way to do kata is to keep the mind free to range throughout the body (*fudoshin*).

Yes, as you know, even this is not enough for lai. The mind must also range outside the skin to include your position in the dojo, your attention must encompass your stance and direction on the floor and an imaginary opponent as well. If you don't achieve this integration of mind, body and environment the kata fall apart. You can prove this easily by starting a multi-directional kata (like Shihogiri of the Kendo Federation Seitei Gata) at a different angle to the one you normally use.

The concepts of Sei and Do in laido reveal a slightly different angle of approach to the integration of mind and body. Sei is calmness, quietness and Do is action and violence. When you sit ready your body is exhibiting Sei, stillness, while your mind must be Do, active. When you start to move and especially when you are cutting, your body is Do, activity and your mind must be Sei, as calm as possible. If you don't achieve this balance your kata will be rough edged. Through working toward a seamless transition between Sei and Do in your "mind" and "body" you come eventually to realize that they are one and the same.

This is a central axiom of bodywork, you can modify the mind by working on the body. In the west the conception has often been that the body is a "mirror" of the mind but this is slowly being replaced by the idea that there is no mind apart from the body, nor is there a body without mind. When the mind is in turmoil the body is tense, relax the body and the mind becomes calm. laido entrains a body and mind awareness that is in balance, able to respond instantly as required but not tense enough to be in stress.

lai includes aspects of the New Age other than bodywork.

Meditation is one such aspect which at first glance seems to deal exclusively with the mind. On deeper analysis it is revealed to have the same goal as bodywork.

MEDITATION

If one wants to be simplistic, meditation can be described as being of two different classes. The first and most familiar is the type where one concentrates on something, a mantra, a problem, a mandala or a kata. This concentration acts to keep all extraneous thoughts from arising in the mind.

The second type of meditation is simply to sit quietly and allow what thoughts arise to do so. The trick here is not to get attached to any one of the thoughts and let it drag your mind along with it, you keep your mind where your body is, in balance.

lai practice produces both types of meditation. As a beginner (and who isn't) one is fully concentrated on the kata to the exclusion of all other thoughts. If one is not paying attention, there is a very real risk of injury. Slightly less dangerous (depending on the instructor) is the fact that the technique will almost immediately fall apart if you start thinking about mortgage payments.

This is not to say that this type of meditation is unlike the second. Even while concentrating on the movement as a whole one must watch against getting caught up in one little aspect. We have all had the experience of trying to correct the angle

of a cut only to see the rest of the kata blow up in our faces because we are no longer concentrating on it. Here we see fushin and fudoshin again.

As you train the subroutines and start to let the body take over more of the concentration on the kata you will still be using the mind to maintain focus but you will now be able to start noticing other thoughts in your mind. This is where the second type of meditation becomes evident. You must maintain fudoshin, an immovable mind on the "mental" plane, one which does not become attached to the extraneous thoughts that you can now notice since your whole attention is no longer taken up with the movements. At this point in practice you might consider some sitting meditation.

THOUGHTS

The most difficult aspect of any practice of the way (Do) is to learn to let the thoughts go. They arise and then drift away the same as the small aches and pains arise and go away in our bodies. When the wrist starts to ache in lai practice, more exercise, violent stretching and lots of concentration is guaranteed to make a small problem larger. The same goes for thoughts, small ones can be put into a "loop of worry". You think of a problem, then concentrate on the further difficulties, then the impossibility of solving the problem, the further difficulties that will make the problem larger, and zoom, you are in a cycle. These thought cycles never reach a conclusion no matter how hard you think about them. They only stop if you break the cycle by such methods as drinking (bad idea), exercising (OK) or some other distraction.

laido, with its repetitive practice would seem to be a good example of a physical cycle which would be the mirror image of the thought cycles. Nothing is further from the truth as we all know. If we are practising in good faith then not one kata will ever be the same as any other that we do. laido practice is a method of learning how to break cycles. If katas are done mechanically, without involving the mind (paying attention) then we fall into a pattern, we make the same mistakes over and over without even realizing we are doing it. In order to continually improve our skills we are forced to learn how to break these patterns without breaking the form of the kata. This same skill teaches us how to break the thought cycles as well.

HOMEWORK

Maybe its the university atmosphere but I always figure that there should be work to do outside of the assigned time slots. laido practice three times a week is not too bad for North America but I like to work on something full time. (Full time is whenever I think about it, lots of you know me personally so I can't even pretend to be perfect.) Perhaps a way can be found to assign homework from the laido classes.

As far as the bodywork aspects of laido are concerned, there is no need to confine practice to the dojo, you are actually expected to carry the practice home with you. This homework can be as simple as paying attention to how you walk, without actually correcting anything. Just watch and get more in tune with the way you move.

KEY POINTS

Here are some hints that may help you develop a private practice. These are all physical exercises and they have a mental component that you can easily figure out. In most cases the same word refers to both the physical and the mental activity. Think of the word balance.

BALANCE

Work on maintaining an even distribution of weight across your body. Stand on two feet instead of one, sit on both cheeks of your buttocks, try to keep the shoulders horizontal no matter what you are doing. Balance Sei and Do (In and Yo, Yin and Yang).

SHOULDERS

Keep the shoulders relaxed at all times. This is the same as keeping the neck relaxed. As the shoulders or the neck tighten you become a stiff necked person. Your centre of gravity rises and your head becomes fixed. Drop the shoulders and free the head.

HEAD

Almost all motion is initiated from the head. The body position follows the head, so the head must be free to move. Keep it in balance atop the spine so that the neck muscles don't need to work to keep it up. If the neck gets stiff it creates tensions that transfer throughout the body. Pull in your chin and stretch the spine up to the sky, keep those disks out of compression.

DIAPHRAGM

The diaphragm must be free to move so that the breath is natural and full. If the diaphragm is constricted only the chest can be used to breathe. This is too shallow and leads to nervousness. Whenever you are out of balance and feeling anxious free the diaphragm, take a big belly breath and drop all the weight off of your shoulders into your hara.

CONSCIOUS MOVEMENT

Keep an awareness of your body. Don't allow any nervous twitches or jumping of the legs, watch and relax every time this is detected.

HARA AWARENESS

The hara is the centre of your physical and mental balance. Keep an eye on it and continue to belly breathe. A soft stomach means an unstressed stomach, who knows, this might mean one less ulcer.

UNSTRAINED BODY POSITION

It makes sense to work with gravity, not against it. Don't hold up your bent head with the neck muscles, or force them to be a bridge between the head and the shoulders by propping your hand under your forehead. Put your head where it is

supposed to sit, above your spine. When you slouch against back of a chair with your butt on the edge of the seat you force the muscles of the lower back to act as cables to hold the bridge. In no time the muscles become fatigued and prone to damage. After you stand up the back takes very little abuse before going into spasm.

Think of the body as a set of stones (bones) that work best as a column in compression not as a cable in tension.

CHAIRS

When you are in a chair, keep balanced, the feet should be flat on the floor, the head balanced on top of the spine, the spine on the back of the chair. Sit so that the bodyweight is transferred to the support (the chair) without needing muscle action to hold it up. The shoulders should be down and the neck relaxed, the diaphragm will be free to move if you are not slouching.

When you are getting up, don't use your arms to push yourself up, instead use your legs under your body. Concentrate on lifting the head to draw the body up, smoothness counts. If you think about pushing your head toward the ceiling your muscles will naturally align your body and your spine will actually lengthen in the process making you more open. Contrast this to crunching over and lurching forward out of the chair barely in control.

SEIZA

After getting over the first screaming agonies of this sitting position, a lot of laidoka start to find that they prefer sitting in seiza to sitting on chairs. There is a reason for this. From seiza it is very easy to find the natural balance of your body. Swing to and fro a bit until you find the apparent balance point, sit for a while and then locate the muscle fatigue to identify problems with your posture. Have someone else arrange your body so that you are symmetrical. Once you are in balance you can sit until your lower legs fall off from lack of blood.

LOTUS

The lotus position has a few variations and is one of the main meditation positions. You need a cushion or something under your rear end to get to an unstrained position. Personally I've never been able to get into balance in any of the lotus positions.

WALKING

When you walk keep the knees flexible, never locked, and you won't be forced to fall forward out of balance in order to move one foot in front of the other. The calves should also be kept flexible and light so that you don't move up over the toes on each step. A lot of wasted energy goes into the up and down bouncing that so many people use when walking.

HEAD

Make sure your head is not bouncing around. It should ride smoothly on your neck in its proper balanced position. Don't look at your feet, they are right where you left them, instead, look ahead at the ground you are about to cover and at your destination. As an exercise, think about where your head went, you can see everything else but where is your head? See D.E. Harding "On Having No Head", (Arkana Books) for more on this interesting subject.

SHOULDERS

The shoulders should be kept aligned square to the direction travelled, the arms free to swing naturally. It is important to keep the shoulders down and relaxed, like you were carrying a couple of shopping bags (cloth of course). All of these postural adjustments should be done naturally, with full relaxation. It will do no good if you force the body into a different position by muscle power. All of us can get tense without instructions, it is learning how to use relaxation that is hard.

ARMS

Just as for the shoulders, the arms must be relaxed. There should be no tension as they swing naturally. The elbows out, shoulders swaying, "weight-lifter" swagger that one sees in the gymnasium makes for a very high centre of balance which, in a martial artist, is dangerous.

WAIST

It is very important to keep the stomach and lower back under an even tension. With too little tension in the stomach, the lower back curves too much and is subject to damage by jarring it. Too much tension and the lower back becomes stiff as the muscles fight the abdominals, the shoulders round off and the balance becomes awkward.

HIPS

When your hips move they should swing from the legs not the waist. The motion must be driven by your stride instead of the lower back. The hips should ride level to the ground as if supported on shock absorbers (knees), not in bumps over the toes. Keep the legs flexible.

STRIDE

If the stride is too long, you can't stop still at any moment. Stay inside your balance, walk with control, not falling forward and catching yourself continually. Move from the hara not from the shoulders. Keep the arms relaxed and swing them freely to balance the legs.

STAIRS AND RAILINGS

This is an important exercise, don't use railings. Keep your hands to yourself at all times. Grabbing anything puts your body immediately off balance so don't touch. Practice moving by leading with your head not your arms.

WALLS AND POSTS

In the same way, never lean up against anything outside of your balance. You should always consider that the support is about to fail.

RUNNING

If you run, you can use the same method of correction used in laido to correct your running style.

- A. Keep the stride in control, not stumbling forward.
- B. Keep the head level as in laido, no extra motions to bleed off energy.
- C. If you suffer from cramps or other problems, concentrate on loosening the muscles without stopping the run. With the practised ability to focus on certain body parts this becomes easy.
- D. Keep your breathing deep and controlled instead of accidental. If you need more breath, adjust your pace to allow faster respiration.

One can also make a case for running to help the laido practice. The knees are tightened up as the leg strength increases. The increased stamina means less control is lost due to tiredness in the dojo. You can use the run to loosen up your forearms. Run with the hands flopping instead of tight, and the elbows bent just far enough for balance. This will relax the shoulders. Never worry about looking silly, take a look at your fellow runners. Remember to run with a forward motion of the arms not sideways. This is the same as keeping your elbows in when doing lai.

As you can see, there is a good chance for lots of homework in laido if you want it.

GET A GRIP: The Importance of Hand Position in Iaido I.

2000

It is almost a truism in Japanese martial arts that power comes from the floor through the hips. In iaido that power must reach the tip of the blade, and the only connection between the tip and the floor is through the hands. In this series we examine some ways one can grip the sword during an iaido kata.

Push or Pull?

On nuki tsuke, the draw of the blade, it is quite common to see students grab the tsuka (hilt) and pull it from the saya (scabbard), in fact that is how we phrase it, to "pull out the sword", to "draw the sword forth". Is this the best way to visualize the motion?



Here in figure 1 we have what seems to be a good grip on the tsuka, and the student pulling the blade from the saya. It doesn't look too bad until we analyze the lines of force from the grip to the floor. Take a look at the right elbow, it is out away from the body, now think about how one would make the tsuka move forward if someone had their hand on the tsuka kashira (pommel). The effort to move the tsuka would be through the deltoid in the shoulder, and no amount of straining from the hips would help.

Now look at this grip (fig. 2), the right hand is at a different angle, and the elbow is close to the body. The tsuka is being pushed forward rather than being pulled and the hips can now contribute to that forward motion. Note that the grip on the tsuka is very light with the little finger and mostly done with the two fingers closest to the body. Note in the first figure (1) that the little finger is wrapped and trying to grip the blade. This is as we normally teach, grip with the little and ring fingers, but it is not correct in this case. We should teach a



grip with the fingers closest to the body, in this case, the index and middle fingers. We'll call this second grip the index finger grip and the first one the little finger grip.



Here is the finish of the draw from the saya (at saya banari) using the grip with the little finger. Again, it doesn't look too bad until we compare it with the next photo, of the grip with the index finger. In both photos the blade is at the same angle but the elbows are not the same at all. Look at the wrist and shoulders, in the first photo they are rolled upward so as to grip the tsuka, in the second they are down and once more in a position to push forward. It would be quite a difficult thing to topple the student in the second photo (Figure 4) by pushing on the

kashira, but no big thing to push the student over onto his back in the little finger grip (Figure 3).



Here is a close-up of the hand position in Figure 4. 4.



Very well, let's consider that we are practising the first kata (Mae) of ZenKenRen Iai (the Kendo Federation Iai set) and continue on to the completed nuki tsuke position. Starting from the little finger grip we see the position in figure 6.



Not bad, the tip is in front of the right shoulder, and at nipple height, the chest is turned 45 degrees to the left, the saya is pulled well around. All in all not a bad position.

Once again, compare the little finger grip of figure 7 with figure 8, the end result of the index finger grip.



Hmm, the tip seems to be a lot further forward in this photo. How can that be, all the other body positions are the same, tip in front of shoulder, chest turned 45 degrees, saya well turned. The difference of course is in the grip.

Here is the grip at the end of the nuki tsuke using the little finger grip to begin (fig 8).



Compared to the grip with the index finger (fig 9).



Figure 8 shows quite a square grip of the tsuka, and a large angle between the forearm and the blade. Figure 9 shows how the tip ends up so much further forward in the index finger grip. The loose little finger of the second grip has pulled the tsuka much further into the palm. Figure 9 shows the now correct "little finger grip" which we usually teach. (As opposed to the incorrect little finger grip during nuki tsuke.)

So, by teaching the students to push the tsuka out of the saya, rather than pulling it out, we end up with the correct grip at the end of nuki tsuke. There should be no need to change this right hand position for the rest of the kata until the noto.



To recap, a little finger grip like figure 10 will result in a square, full finger-gripped nuki tsuke like figure 6.

While a grip like figure 11 will result in a nuki tsuke like figure 7 with the little fingers tight, and the index finger loose.



Take a moment and compare the shoulders and elbows of these last two figures. Note the angle of the elbow in each, and visualize what would happen if you were to push back on the tsuka kashira in each case. Still not convinced, look again at the rounded back of figure 10, and the off-square chest, compare that to the straight back in figure 11 and the squared chest. One is dead, one gives a feeling of power, even in the relaxed pose used here for the photographs.

If you were a knowledgeable swordsman (as you are now), which grip would give you most pause were you to be within range of the blade?

In the next article we will examine the grip for the cut.

laito for this article supplied by: Fujiwara Kanefusa

GET ANOTHER GRIP: The Importance of Hand Position in Iaido II.

2000

Last article we discussed two different grips on the tsuka while drawing and cutting with the blade. This time we will continue with that discussion and find out that life isn't quite as clear-cut as we may think.

We noted the difference on the nuki tsuke of the "index finger" and the "little finger" grips when we come to the finish of nuki tsuke, the draw and cut. What are the implications of this difference in grip for the rest of the kata? Well it depends, are we talking about a one handed or a two handed cut?

First, let's examine the grip itself.



Take a look at Figure 1 here, and Figure 2 just below. This is the correct grip for a two handed swing from overhead. It is the same grip as we saw last article which resulted in a longer reach on the initial cut. Here, however, with two hands on the blade we get a much more powerful cut. With the hands at shoulder height as in figure 2, the left thumb touches the underside of the right wrist. The monouchi (about a third of the way back from the tip) is at the height of the forehead (of the student or of an opponent of equal height), and the reach

is optimized. Note carefully the fingers of the right hand in Figure 2, see how the index finger and thumb are not overlapped. In fact the thumb touches the second

finger.



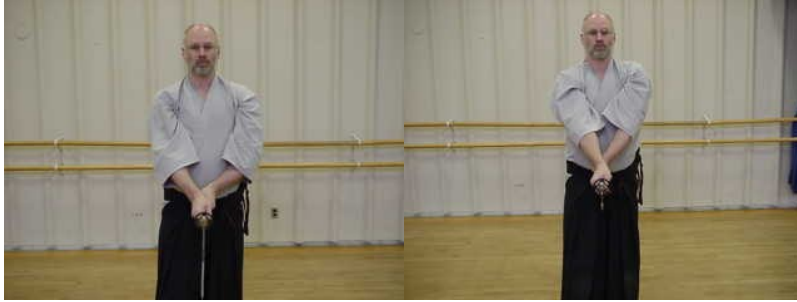
Now in figure 3 we see the other grip. The index finger overlaps the thumb, and is used in the grip. See how this changes the angles between the blade and the forearms, and how it is now impossible to extend the tip forward, or touch the right thumb to the left wrist without "breaking" the wrists. This grip is common in beginners, and gives a short, circular shaped chop as opposed to the lovely elliptical slice we so prize in iai.



Once more, the grip must be from the little fingers, those closest to the body, for the grip to be correct.



Let's continue the swing down to the horizontal position. Compare figures 4 and 5, in 4 the softer grip with the index fingers allows the blade to move naturally down, while the tension in the index fingers in figure 5 keeps the tip up. It also keeps the shoulders up and the entire blade further forward.



Figures 6 and 7 show the same thing from the front. Notice how the index finger tightness in figure 7 pulls the hands over top of the tsuka, straightening the elbows and raising the shoulders.



This hand grip is illustrated more clearly here in figures 8 and 9. The "over the top", thumb overlapping index finger grip makes for a stiff, shoulder-driven swing that just doesn't have the grace, smoothness or power of the little finger grip.

But is this grip always the best choice? If you can keep a secret, take a look at the next pair of photographs.



Figure 10 shows a one handed swing of the blade using the little finger grip. This position may be the end of a "kiri tsuke" movement, a draw into a downward cut as you would find in the ZNKR iai kata Morote Tsuki. See how extended the elbow is, and how the tsuka seems in danger of slipping right up across the hand as the swordsman strains at the elbow to stop the cut.

Now take a look at this photo (fig 11), and note how much more powerful it looks. The blade is firmly gripped in the palm and the tsuka is backed up by the wrist rather than



by the palm.



This is more clearly illustrated here in figures 12 and 13. Imagine a line of force moving from the tip of the blade up through the hand. In figure 12 (little finger grip) you can see that the line of force misses the wrist, while the more "over the top" grip of figure 13 means that the blade is lined up with the forearm. On a one handed cut, where you wish to drop the blade down your centreline with power, and where you wish to stop or otherwise control the blade, it is of some considerable advantage to use a more full-fingered grip, and to bend the wrist into the cut. With two hands, the two angles of the hands cancel out and the blade moves down the centre line smoothly using the slightly off-centred little finger grip.



To sum up then, for a one handed cut you should take a grip that puts the tsuka across your palm almost squarely as in figure 14.



While for a two handed swing, a grip which puts the tsuka diagonally across the palm, as in figure 15, is more desirable.

This discussion has covered a lot of ground and introduced some potentially confusing concepts, my advice, as always, is to follow what your instructor is teaching you. This is particularly true

of the discussion of the two handed grip. Many instructors (myself included) prefer to teach their beginning students a very square, "over the top" grip for the first few years. This is to correct the very common beginner practice of gripping the sword from the sides.

With long practice and constant correction of the shape of the swing, these students will naturally relax their grips into the more desirable diagonal grip.

Let's hear it for Seitei

2009

Let's hear it for Seitei

When I was younger I used to write every day, usually bad poetry of the 20 year old existential angst slash wounded in love type, but I would always start with a warmup verse or two. I always wrote about my pen and my notebook... well let me demonstrate.

Little white computer
mouse, almost larger than the screen
and a flexible keyboard that wobbles
almost worse than my feelings
toward seitei iai
that endlessly changing, always static
never to be owned
art of the sword.

Looking
as always
for just a little inspiration.

There you have it, another in a series of hundreds of poems dedicated to the tools of my trade. It's a warmup, a way to get the pen moving over the paper, or in this case, my fingers moving over this silly roll-up keyboard which is better than the tiny little thing attached to the eeepc I'm using, but not much. Nor is it much less wobbly in the keys. Regardless, now I'm writing and in the warmup I've even managed to catch my reason for writing.

Which is "thank kami for seitei gata"

Having spent three days in Boise Idaho at the AUSKF national iaido seminar being a student again, I am thoroughly worked over. My left foot is so damaged I'm still limping almost two weeks later. I suppose tromping through the woods with a chainsaw cutting wood so my students don't freeze to death this winter doesn't help.

Yes I cut wood for my students and yes that's a plea for some sympathy. You have to be brutally self-honest in the martial arts... but that's another story.

Standing in front of Kishimoto sensei, chair of the iaido section of the All Japan Kendo Federation, I was back in school, twisting and turning my feet, trying to catch

the latest nuances of Zen Ken Ren Iai or as we all call it, Seitei Gata.

This set, which has been around for 30 years, is still being refined, with the occasional "change" but mostly with explanations that come down from the top fellow, through the committee, down to all the 8dans, then the sevens, and maybe, if we're lucky, to the students in the west. See why I was there to watch the man himself?... and Yamazaki sensei too by the way, not sure if he's number three or number two at the moment, but either way, he's worth watching too.

My thoughts during the seminar, being right up front, listening carefully as I was told that the furikaburi motion was now back to where I did it 15 years ago, before spending ten changing it to what was then the correct motion? Well after I finished laughing out loud I thought "chewy".

OK it's a strange word to pop into my head but let's face it, I've now got months worth of things to chew over in my head and especially in my practice. Months to work the details into my own iaido, to force myself to pay attention and to refine my ability to control the sword.

Which is of course, the intention. Seitei is where everyone in the organization demonstrates that they can control their sword. By working on the details forever, by concentrating on the physical refinements and the riai, the meaning behind the movements, we all understand the sword a bit better each time we practice.

Compare this to an iaido practice where you "own" the techniques. You do them as you feel they are right and correct and you never change them due to outside instruction since they are "yours" and you do them as a demonstration of your own understanding of iaido.

That can get pretty stale pretty fast. As you get older and fall into bad habits your iaido will drift and change, usually not for the better. With no need to pay attention to what you're doing you can start to get sloppy. Of course you can compensate for this if your ego will let you study and learn from others, and if you're still a junior the problem doesn't arise since you're still learning, but for those who are at the top of their particular hill.... well as I said, "thank the kami for seitei" because if I ever get to the top of my particular hill I'll still have something to keep me honest, something chewy.

Oh, how do you get to the top of your hill? Stick around long enough and you'll be there.

The Three Attacking Points of the Sword

2008

One of the nice things you can do in laido is self-correct. It is a solo art and it's entirely possible to correct yourself while practising away from a sensei. What follows is something that I realize I don't have a good name for, but it's a way of looking at the position of the sword in your hand in relation to your imaginary opponent. This is a method of thinking about the sword in your hand that is mostly derived from my own personal practice and so I take responsibility for what I write here. Please don't feel that you need to practice like this in your own art, just take it as a way of thinking about things that you might adapt to the movements and logic you have learned so far. These "rules" are derived from the meaning of the kata, the *riai* of what is happening between swordsman and opponent.

For me, it is very important to have pressure (*seme*) on the opponent (*teki*) at all times during an *iai* kata. In simple terms this means that we must be able to attack directly from the sword position we have at this (any) instant, without having to go through a chambering position.

What are the points on the sword we can use to attack? They are the edge near the tip (*monouchi*), the tip itself (*kissaki*) and the butt end of the hilt (*tsuka kashira*). I have found that these three points are facing the opponent during most of any *iai* kata, and from any place where one of these face the opponent, the sword can be used to attack directly. So I keep these positions facing my imaginary opponent as he and I move around.

This is easiest to show in photos so here we go with an explanation using the first kata (*Mae*) from *Zen Ken Ren Iai* (*seitei gata*):



Here we sit in seiza with the blade in a neutral position, the tsuka kashira aimed slightly away from the opponent.



As we rise the right hand moves directly from its position on the thigh toward the solar plexus (suigetsu) of the opponent, bringing the kashira on a straight line from its original position toward the suigetsu as well.



Here we have cut across the forehead using the monouchi (edge) and we have stopped just outside the target with the kissaki tip still aimed at the opponent (teki).



As we return the blade around the left side of the head before taking it up and over we threaten teki with the monouchi.



The blade moves over the head (furi kaburi) and centres with the tsuka kashira (pommel) aimed at teki.



Cutting, monouchi.



At the finish of the cut, kissaki



Beginning the chiburi, monouchi threatening. Ignore the left hand, its in the wrong place, should be on the belt at the left hip.



At the end of the movement around to the back we see the kashira facing teki.



As we bend the elbow the kashira remains aimed at teki.



The "cutting" motion of chiburi, monouchi to teki.



The finish of chiburi, kissaki faces teki



The kissaki remains aimed at teki through the foot switch



Here is one of the points where we do not follow this rule. We use blades that are longer than we used to use a generation or two ago, and we do not move the hips during noto so we take the tsuka kashira off of teki for this movement. Note that the sword angle is the same as when we started the kata. We must be ready throughout this action to draw toward teki again if need be.



At the end of noto we have gathered all our power back into ourselves and could draw once more quite easily.



Here are some positions which I consider "wrong". During the draw it is common to aim somewhere to the left (camera left) of teki. I won't argue that this is considered correct for some koryu, I know it is and I know the reason for it but for ZenKenRen iai it's not correct.



Here is the end of the opening horizontal cut and we have moved well past the target and are now aiming at something well off to the left. No threat to teki here, we'd have to bring the tip back or chamber the sword above our heads to then cut. I certainly don't feel threatened by this position.



Here our foolish fellow has turned the edge upward, away from teki and is lifting the blade upward while dropping his right arm. How could one cut directly from this position and do any damage?



And here the blade tip has rotated past the correct point to end up facing someone to the right of the camera. The cut will be lucky to end up in the right place without a curved slice through teki.



Chiburi, and the tip again rotates to a useless position, aimed at who knows what, but not at teki. At least the left hand is in the right spot now.



The result of the last position is the blade in behind the swordsman's head. That's how the fellow lost all his hair!



Of course one could go too far the other way, in which case the blade is in front of the forehead but not in any sort of threatening position. Again, I know that there are koryu which use this position but for my purposes here this is not a strong threatening position toward teki.



Finally, at the end of chiburi we see the tip well outside any threatening position toward teki. Hey the guy isn't even looking at teki, he's looking at the camera guy instead. The ham.

Doubtless some folks will disagree with my "mistakes" due to their own koryu practice but I will remind you again that I am aware of other ways of moving the sword, and the reasons behind them. This particular example is for ZenKenRen iai, which is from the Kendo Federation and as such is very dedicated to seme and to zanshin. This is the kendo federation iaido so it must have the same spirit as kendo itself, hips that are square to the opponent, and pressure all the time, along with the ability to attack instantly at each moment. Many positions in the "mistake" section will assume that the opponent is dead, or that there is only one attacker. For ZenKenRen iai we assume neither.

Riai and Technique: The Story and the Performance

2009

Ji Ri is the technique and the theory, the performance and the story. The concept of jiri ichi is the unification of the two, the understanding of the meaning behind the movement, and is something that examiners are instructed to look for at the upper levels of practice. In this article we examine the fundamental relationship of riai (the theory) on the performance of the kata.

Riai is the story behind your kata. It is what gives the movements their meaning and is what the kata should be "saying" to those watching. When the riai changes, the technical aspects of the kata can change quite dramatically. I will illustrate this using the kata Uke Nagashi from the Zen Ken Ren laido set.

I first learned this kata with the following story. You are sitting in seiza when an opponent approaches from your left and cuts down on your head. You rise, protecting your head with your own blade and cut him down diagonally.



Fig 1: Attack happens as you sit in seiza



Fig 2: First move clears your body



Fig 3: Block is "insurance"



Fig 4: Strike down



Fig 5: Step back as you cut

From the first sequence of photos you will see what this looks like. Elizabeth is holding a bokuto where the cut would be made as I sit on the floor (fig 1). Normally she would be attacking from your position, but for this illustration she is behind, to mark where the cut happens. As the cut is being made I step forward and draw the blade upward (fig 2) which moves me out of the way of the cut, I continue to raise the blade into a blocking position called uke nagashi as I rise (fig 3). Note that my feet are still in the same place on the floor. Something to consider here is that the blocking movement does not actually need to make contact with the attacking sword, my body is out of danger to the side of the cut. I then bring the right foot up to the left and turn to face the opponent, swinging the sword around and overhead at the same time and gripping the hilt with my left hand (fig 4). From here I cut down diagonally through the opponent as I pull my foot back (fig. 5).

This kata makes perfect sense given the situation where the opponent is cutting down on us as we rise.



Fig 6: The attack comes later, the swordsman is partially rising



Fig 7: The block must deflect the cut



Fig 8: The blade is turned over



Fig 9: The cut begins



Fig 10: The cut finishes with the pull back of the foot

Recently the instruction in this kata has been slightly different, with the opponent now sitting down some distance away from us, rising to his feet, approaching and cutting down on us. This riai states that we now have more time and more space to react, so we do. Figure 6 shows me in a half raised position when the attack happens, and Elizabeth has her bokuto marking where that cut would be made. You can see that the cut will not miss my body when I am on one knee as it did before, because the attacking swordsman has adjusted to my movement forward. In this case my defence is to stand and make contact with my blade on the attacking blade

to deflect it off line. Figure 7 shows the deflecting position which is achieved at the same time as I bring my right foot up beside my left. You can see that the attacking sword would be cutting into my shoulder if I did not meet it in the deflection. Figures 8, 9 and 10 show the sword swinging around to above my right shoulder, the hit on the shoulder of the opponent and the cut as I pull my right foot back.

So, a small change in the riai (the attacker is sitting down) means a change in the timing and the meaning of the kata, with the raising of the blade into the overhead defensive position happening later, as the swordsman stands up, rather than before the right foot is moved forward. The riai also requires a more definite kime (focus) on the block since the attacking blade is definitely making contact with our blade as we rise.

Overall, the technique remains roughly the same and most people would not pick up the change in timing, but to an experienced iaido student, that timing means something has changed in the riai, the story is different.

Why is Seitei so Changeable

2009

At a seminar recently I overheard such comments as "hey it's back to where we originally did it" and "they're not going to like this at..." and "do it the new way for grading but we'll do it this way here".

I've said it myself I must admit, but I don't any more. In fact I have sometimes argued that seitei doesn't change much at all since it's written down and only changes when the written manual is changed in some way. That doesn't happen very often. But we all know that it does change, every new sensei we meet has some different way of doing the kata so let's take the changes for granted and go from there.

Specifically I'm talking about the Zen Nihon Kendo Renmei iaido set in this article but this applies to any art that has a similar seitei gata, a set of representative forms which are supposed to be taught in a consistent way to everyone.

I've come to believe that seitei is a conversation. It's a discussion between many very highly skilled swordsmen who all have their own ideas but come together to examine their art. At the very top is the chairman of the iaido committee who will have a big influence on the art, but who is not usually at the top for very long as he retires and is replaced in a few years with someone else. Below him, we have a set of folks who, as I said, are highly experienced and they will agree with the current practice in certain ways, and disagree in others. This is the continuing conversation, and you need to pay attention to keep up.

What? You figure there's only one right way to do an iaido kata? If that were true there would only be one school and no need for a seitei set at all.

The conversation is the same one that goes on in any society about any topic, and in the same way you can be current or not, participate or not. It won't make a great deal of difference unless you are many years out of date and can't understand what everyone else is talking about at all.

Some folks will be closer to the seitei discussion, some will live further away. Some will have time to devote to the topic, others may not. In some cases folks will stop listening, or they won't have the time, or they will be happy with things the way they are / have always been.

It's all good, but out of the conversation you will get "changes" to seitei, and out of those changes, if you pay attention, you will learn many things and your own practice will become richer and deeper.

So, seitei is a conversation, a big party full of interesting people discussing something you love. In that case, what's koryu? In the west we usually call it a family. An extended family with a strong matriarch I suppose, it can be peaceful or dysfunctional, usually depending on the personality of grannie. Members may not get a lot of say in what goes on unless grannie is interested in their views, and grannie may be around for a very long time. In other words, koryu may not be much of a discussion at all compared to seitei.

Does that mean that koryu don't change? Of course not, in fact koryu can change extremely fast, with a single decision by the headmaster, and no other opinions need be sought. Koryu can also change when the headmaster dies and the new headmaster takes over with a determination to put his or her stamp on the school.

In this way you might get changes in koryu that are a lot more dramatic than the discussion that is seitei can produce.

So, the discussion and the matriarchy, two ways that you can think about seitei and koryu and how each of them can produce changes in the arts they represent.

I have written two articles which deal with changes in seitei and in koryu and you will find them at: [Riai and Technique: The Story and the Performance](#) and [Changes in Koryu: A Case Study from Hyoho Niten Ichiryu](#)

In the first, I discuss how a change in a single action by the imaginary opponent has changed the way one of the seitei iaido kata is performed. In the second, I give my view that a koryu has changed in many ways due to a decision by the headmaster to train his students in a different way.

The Goshingata Experiment

2009

This is an experiment. It was set up at the request of Ken Morgan, one of my students who, during yet another discussion of whether or not one could learn iaido from a book, suggested that we simply try it.

I was asked to come up with a novel kata and I have done so here. Actually I have come up with 5 new kata (Go Shin Gata... I have no idea if that sounds right in Japanese or not but it ought to do to identify the set for us).

There are no photos, videos or illustrations provided, only text.

There are two files, one very simple for those who are experienced in ZNKR iaido, and one for those who are beginners. Not knowing just how beginner our theoretical beginner is, I have assumed they have at least a week of practice where they have learned how to hold the sword and how to wear the outfit.

I have tried to write some kata that are not familiar to anyone, although an experienced iaido person will recognize, is intended to recognize, certain basic movements so that they can fill in the gaps. Our absolute beginner will also have to fill in some gaps, but not as many since they will be using more complete directions.

Here is the experiment, advanced students (let's say yudansha students) should open the simplified instructions and take a week to try and work through the kata. These are very basic instructions, bare bones, and should be difficult to get right. At the end of the week please film yourself doing the kata. Then download the more complete instructions and go through the kata once more for a week, then film yourself. Send both sets of videos along to me, or upload them to youtube or whatever, so we can all look at them.

Beginners who wish to try this can check out both text files at once and go at it for a week, then film yourself and send in the video.

I will film myself doing the kata as I envisioned them while writing them down. In the end we should be able to see just how close one can get to learning an iaido kata from text alone.

Once I have filmed the kata as I created them we can repeat the experiment with new subjects using both text and video and see how close they come to learning the set as it was created. Of course those who have already tried them with the text can check out the videos and re-refine their kata to see if their new video is different from the earlier one or two.

By the way, I believe it would be possible to derive partner practices from all these kata if anyone wants to test the hypothesis that it may be possible to learn solo kata from a book, but not partner kata. Of course I would need to do the text before anyone had the chance to look at the solo videos, but I suppose I can always make up different kata later.

Simple Instructions: [Goshingata lai: Simple Instructions for Experienced laidoka](https://ejmas.com/pt/2009pt/ptart_taylor-2_0910.html)
https://ejmas.com/pt/2009pt/ptart_taylor-2_0910.html

Detailed Instructions: [Goshingata lai: Detailed Instructions](https://ejmas.com/pt/2009pt/ptart_taylor-3_0910.html)
https://ejmas.com/pt/2009pt/ptart_taylor-3_0910.html

Downloading the videos below on PC type computers requires that you right click and "save link as"

Video [from the front](https://ejmas.com/pt/2009pt/goshingata-front.asf) asf format
<https://ejmas.com/pt/2009pt/goshingata-front.asf>

Video [from the side](https://ejmas.com/pt/2009pt/goshingata-side.asf) asf format
<https://ejmas.com/pt/2009pt/goshingata-side.asf>

Video of [Haya Nuki \(continuous practice\)](https://ejmas.com/pt/2009pt/goshingata-hayanuki.asf) asf format
<https://ejmas.com/pt/2009pt/goshingata-hayanuki.asf>

Good luck
Kim Taylor

Maai and Personal Space in Iaido

- 2010

Iaido is a difficult art to practice because we have no opponent, or rather, our opponent is imaginary and invisible. In this article I will discuss the concept of maai in relation to our impression of personal space and I will examine the interpretation of iaido kata in relation to this awareness of space.

Maai is often described as the combative space, the attacking or killing distance between two opponents. It has elements of time as well, and I will discuss that a bit later. Personal space is defined as that distance around ourselves that we are comfortable with. As people move into that space we become uneasy. Personal space is something that we all feel, and I believe that we can relate it in general terms to combative distance, or at least use it to understand the maai of our imaginary opponent (kasso teki) in iaido.

Personal space is not uniform around a single person or between different people. Consider an elevator, there is a reason why people, in this crowded situation, all face the same direction (toward the doors). This provides us all with the minimum personal space and the least discomfort. If you want to test this, stand with your back facing the door, looking at the rest of the crowd. You will notice that a space tends to open up between the rest of the people and yourself. The same thing happens, to a lesser extent if you face inward from the side of the elevator, at 90 degrees to the rest of the people.

Now let's consider the first three techniques of Omori ryu or Shoden, the first level of iaido practice in the Muso Jikiden Eishin ryu or the Muso Shinden ryu. These kata are Mae/Shohatto, Migi/Sato, and Hidari/Uto. The opponent is facing our front, left and right sides respectively.

Let's examine Mae first, with the opponent sitting facing us. I asked Tom and Chris, two students of iaido to sit facing each other at the closest comfortable distance. In the first photo (fig 1) you will see them about 9 wall-lines apart, or about two brackets apart.

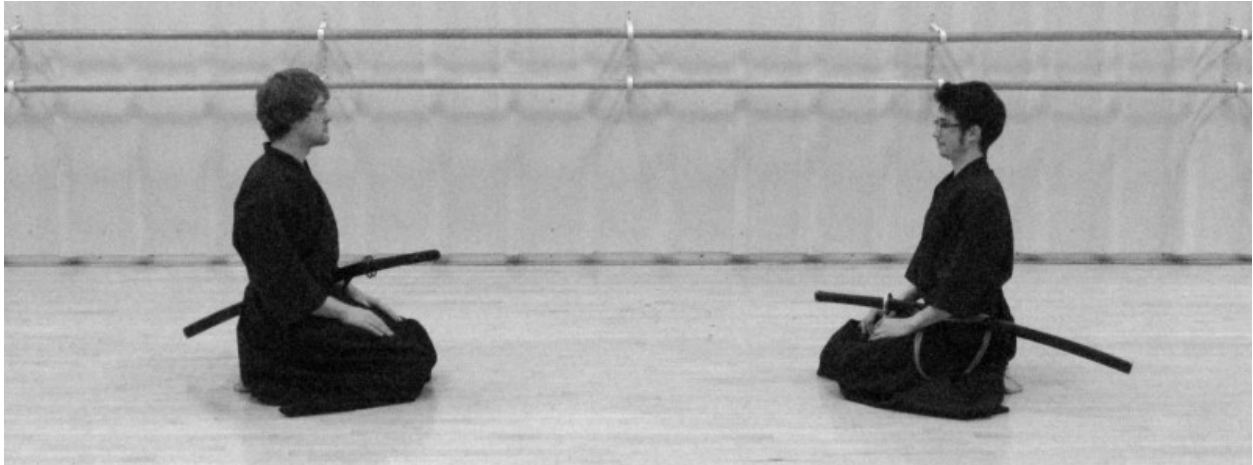


fig 1, Mae, minimum comfortable personal distance.

At the end of the photos I again asked them to take the minimum comfortable distance apart and this is Fig 2.



fig 2, Mae, minimum comfortable personal distance.

Careful counting shows that they are now 8 wall-lines apart, just slightly closer than they were at the first of the photo session. This is fairly consistent and I don't want to suggest that they are now a bit more comfortable so are sitting 6 inches closer... that would be extrapolating from too few data points.

Fig 3 shows how close they are in relation to combative distance, they held their arms out to measure how close they actually were.



Fig 3, actual distance

As is readily apparent, they are actually slightly outside sword-cutting range, if they were holding their blades neither would touch the other without rising onto their knees (and thus moving forward the length of their shins).

So this minimum personal space seems to correspond well with *maai* for the first kata, *Mae/Shohatto*.

Fig 4. Moving to *Migi* and *Hidari* I first asked Tom (on the left) to sit as close to Chris (who is facing Tom) as he was comfortable sitting.



*fig 4, *Migi/Sato*, minimum comfortable personal space*

How close is he?



fig 5, Migi/Sato, actual combative distance

He's close, in fact he's within combative range, but not too far within to prevent Tom from performing the kata and being at the correct range. It seems that Tom's personal space doesn't extend as far to the side as it does to the front. Interestingly, when I asked them to exchange their positions so that we could see the situation for Hidari we get the situation in figure 6 and 7.



figs. 6 and 7, Hidari/Uto personal distance and combative distance.

It seems that Chris' personal space is not the same as Tom's. It is so small that Chris would not be able to do the kata. Perhaps Chris understands that he is now within Tom's combative range and so feels safe from the sword at least. He is also almost, but not quite in punching range, Tom would have to rise up/forward to reach his head with his hand.

So, are Migi and Hidari correctly begun from this seating arrangement? Let's look at the situation where the two start by sitting side by side. Again I asked Tom and Chris to sit as close as they were comfortable sitting. Figures 8 and 9 show the results of one, then the other setting the distance. It seems that they both have the same comfort zone toward someone facing the same way they are facing.



figs. 8 and 9, Tom, then Chris sitting as close as is comfortable to the other.

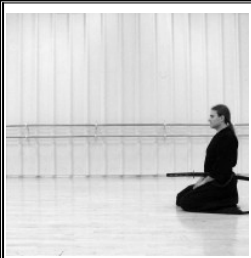





So where are our our imaginary opponents facing? In the first kata it is reasonable to assume that they are facing us from the front. In the second and third kata are our opponents sitting side by side with us and then turning toward us to attack or are they sitting initially at 90 degrees to us and starting their attack from that point? I think it is pretty obvious that our opponent must be sitting, facing us if we are to perform these kata as they are taught, this investigation into personal space would indicate that our opponent would be much too close if we began the kata with both of us facing the same way and sitting comfortably close.

I don't intend to suggest that this proves we cannot begin this kata from the side by side position, we certainly could, all we need do is sit further apart, but I do suggest that for us to be able to use the feeling of personal space to help us "feel" our imaginary opponent, it is better for us to have that ghostly enemy facing us. In that way we can tap into our feelings about personal space to identify the combative






distance we need to deal with.

I mentioned earlier that I thought the relationship of maai and time should be examined. It is apparent, on thinking about our past experiences, that personal space will close up with familiarity (time). As we sit longer beside someone we relax our space, think about a long bus ride beside a stranger. This experience of time relates to combative distance as well, it is obvious that we allow those we are familiar with to get closer to us and so they would have better access than a stranger, should they wish us harm. On a shorter time span, we can be also be sucked into a dangerous distance by the lack of reaction from our opponent over time as our combative or personal space is invaded. This "drifting into range" is a familiar sight in any Kendo match between opponents of different skill levels.

Can we use this feeling of personal space elsewhere in our iaido practice? Consider the technique Tsuke Komi (Gyakuto) which is as follows.

		
<p>The swordsman moves forward, drawing toward the opponent. This means that he has moved into the opponent's combative (personal) space, which forces the opponent to stop and cut short, to cut sooner than he expected. The swordsman takes advantage of this and stands up to avoid the short cut and immediately strikes into the opponent's forehead.</p>		
		
<p>While continuing to press into the opponent's personal space the swordsman steps and cuts once more, cutting all the way down to horizontal.</p>	<p>Then the swordsman steps back , making distance to cut a third time but it is not necessary.</p>	<p>The swordsman sinks onto one knee and prepares to clean and put the sword away.</p>

Looked at with a partner:

		
<p>Here is where the opponent (Kat) is intending to hit Pam.</p>	<p>If Pam moves forward inside the combative distance Kat cannot hit properly</p>	<p>So as Kat approaches, Pam moves into that space which forces Kat to shorten up her step and her swing</p>
		
<p>Which means that as Pam steps back and up she is out of range of the cut which allows her to continue the technique</p>	<p>with a return cut to the forehead. Note that Kat has swung down to where she expected Pam to be, leaving space for Pam to enter and strike.</p>	

This same driving into the opponent's personal/combative space happens again in the technique Oi Kaze (Koranto). This technique is like Mae but running forward. As an opponent walks toward us to draw and cut, we grasp our sword and take two quick steps into his space. This means that our opponent must back up to make enough space to draw and cut us, at which time we chase with shorter steps, draw and cut him horizontally, then finish with a vertical cut.



Oi Kaze. In this case Kat intends to come to this position



And cut into Pam's shoulder with her draw and cut.



But as Kat moves into that distance



Pam takes two steps into Kat's combative space which will force Kat to start moving backward to get the distance to draw and cut. Pam chases and cuts horizontally before Kat can do this.

I have argued that we can use our sense of personal space, that distance where we begin to feel uncomfortable as someone comes closer to us, to get a feel for the opponent in an iaito kata. Using this definition of personal space I would also argue that combative space (maai) is the same as personal space once a swordsman gains some experience. When fighting or when doing a kata it should make us uncomfortable when an opponent moves into attacking range. We can tap into our experience of "too close" in everyday life to help us understand maai.

Maai as a Way of Separating Koryu and Seitei

- 2010

First let me quickly say that I don't have an overall point about distance within koryu or seitei forms. What follows is simply a way to look at a difference between a kata done in a koryu and in a seitei set of techniques in order to understand how to look at maai in a kata.

Distance is often a problem in iaido but it can also be a problem in a partner practice such as jodo. We will examine two jodo kata, one from the koryu (Shindo Muso Ryu) and one from the ZenKenRen jo (seitei) set. We will then look at another pair of kata from Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu and from the ZenKenRen iai (seitei) set. Distance is pretty easy to see in a partner practice, but it exists in the solo practice of iaido as well, as we shall see.

Jodo Seigan

The jodo kata Seigan is the final kata in the Chudan set of the Shindo Muso Ryu and it is the tenth kata of the ZNKR jo. The sword approaches the jo with the blade in the belt ("saya"). Jo takes the initiative and forces sword to stop by shoving the jo into his face, then locking his right wrist down as sword grasps the hilt. As sword tries to disengage under the jo to draw the blade, jo reverses his weapon and thrusts into the short ribs of sword to force him back. Sword manages to draw the sword and takes a swing at jo's forward hand. Jo avoids and reverses the stick once more to strike down onto sword's head (koryu) or solar plexus (seitei).

In the Kendo Federation schools, the seitei is usually practised first and sword often has a problem with being too close to do the cut to the hand. The usual instruction is for the jo to be told to thrust more aggressively to encourage sword to move back further. Similarly, jo is often too close after the avoidance of the cut to the hand, and he is often told to move back more fully as sword cuts.

Students often have a problem with these instructions as they don't seem to make sense intrinsically, why should one step and cut if the target is in range? Once the student has studied Seigan from the koryu, a possible answer presents itself in the form of a simple difference in maai, a choice point that is based on a difference in distance which happens when the sword disengages to draw the sword. If the sword is very aggressive he may only withdraw as far as is needed to avoid being struck with the jo, and then counter strike very quickly. If the sword wishes a bit more space to move and breath, he may withdraw further than is strictly necessary in order to better assess the situation. Depending on this initial separation by sword, jo will be best served by one form of the kata or another.

Here are some photographs to illustrate the point.



Jo interrupts sword as she walks forward by thrusting into her face.



Then locks the jo down on the right wrist.



Sword responds by dropping the hilt under the jo and drawing while turning away to the right.



Jo responds by reversing the stick and thrusting at sword to encourage her to step back. This is the end of the common movements.



Koryu: Here sword has stepped back just far enough to avoid being hit with the stick



Seitei: In this case, sword has chosen to move back further as she avoids the stick.



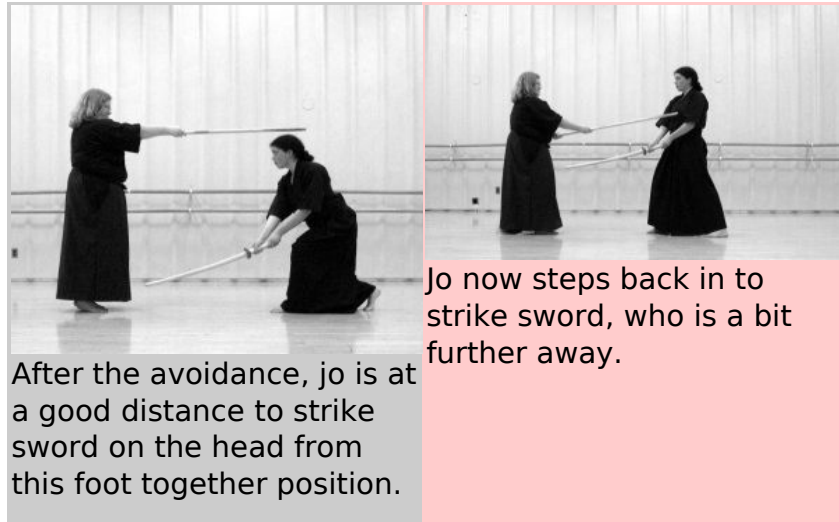
We can see that at this distance sword can strike jo on the forearm.



As sword strikes for the forearm, jo removes her hand and slides her hands to the other end of the jo.



As the sword steps back in with the right foot, jo avoids the cut.



It is often said that the seitei form of Seigan is done because the koryu version is too dangerous. I tend to agree that the koryu form may be dangerous for beginners, but why the extra stepping? It would be as easy to simply drop the target from the head to the chest would it not? Actually the chest is an awkward target if the distance is too close, as most jodo students have found. The longer maai in the seitei version of the kata makes the chest a good target.

Once again, in this partner practice it is easy to see the maai, and how it affects the kata, or rather, how the kata movements themselves determine what the maai should be. If we are told to step in and attack, the maai must be such that we need to step in to attack the target correctly. If we have to do strange stutter steps to avoid cutting someone behind our partner, we are likely not at the proper maai.

Iaido Mae

Let's move on to iaido where it is sometimes hard to understand what is happening since we have no partner. One of the common differences between Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu and ZKRiai mae is that the koryu version is "more square". We may be told that this is a result of the different targets, with koryu cutting across our imaginary opponent's chest (and thus a wider, more square finish position for nuki tsuke, the first strike). In Seitei we are cutting across the face, which means that we finish our strike with the tip of the blade in front of our right shoulder, thus the chest is angled more toward the left than for koryu.

Let's use this to look at another "difference" between seitei and koryu, the slide forward in seitei vs. the shorter movement in the koryu. If you don't know what I'm talking about here, there are many videos available online which will show these two kata. One convenient place would be http://sdksupplies.com/cat_video_download.html

Why do we slide forward in Seitei Mae and not in Koryu Mae? Let's look at the pictures while we remember that for both versions, the initial horizontal cut is done at the same height.

Zen Ken Ren lai (Seitei) Mae



Anticipating trouble, the defender (right) gets the jump on the attacker (left).

Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu (Koryu) Mae.



Here the attacker on the left has a slight "drop" on the defender on the right.



Before the attacker can rise, the defender cuts her across the eyes. Note that the defender must stretch forward to reach the target so her chest is angled.



In Koryu Mae the target of the first cut (nuki tsuke) is the right shoulder of the attacker. As you can see, the attacker must have risen up to put the shoulder into the same height as the draw. Note the more square position of the defender's body.



When the defender squares up to grasp the blade with both hands, she is out of range of the target, so she must slide forward in order to do the second cut.



Because we move forward as well as up when we rise out of seiza (due to being hinged at the knees) the defender can now reach the attacker's head without having to slide forward.

So we see that even though there is no partner to work with in iaido, the kata still inform us about maai. Our imaginary attacker (teki) must be in certain positions and at a certain distance for our kata to "work".

I hope these two simple examples of how to think about the effects of maai in pairs of kata will stimulate more thought about your own practice.

Thanks to Liz and Pam for taking some time out of their practice to model for these photographs.

Down to the Count

- 2010

The draw in the first ZNKR iaido kata (Mae) is often broken down into several steps to allow students to examine their technique.

In my own classes I have usually broken the draw into three parts, 1: the draw, 2: the close of the fingers and 3: the opening of the chest / closing of the shoulder-blades. This allows students to understand the shape of the opening cut, which is to draw toward the opponent, then cut at the maximum distance away with power and accuracy. The details are given below in the photographs if you are unfamiliar with iaido.

There is a potential problem with teaching this way, especially if a student is introduced to the concept without subsequent observation by the instructor. He may assume that this is "the way" to cut, and misunderstand that it is a break-down of the mechanics to allow them to be examined separately. In other words, his cut becomes a mechanical 1-2-3 movement where the hand is stretched to its maximum before the arm is moved across the body. The result is a weak cut which is "digital", it has discrete movements, rather than "analogue". The maximum power is traded off to a certain extent with the maximum distance from the body. The hand must be closing through its maximum power range while the sword tip is cutting across the target, and since the maximum power of any muscle is somewhere around 2/3 of its contraction range, that means the hand is not completely finished moving before the shoulders are moved during the cut.

Part of the problem is in what I have called the "fallacy of expanding time in kata". This is the idea that more and more steps can be introduced into a combative movement without it breaking down. I first noticed this in aikido practice where my partner would say "I can do this here" and I would say "well then I would do this" and he would counter with "well then I would do this". The fallacy of course is that if someone is punching you in the head you usually don't have all day to go through a range of movements and counter-movements, he punches, you counter, he falls down is the most favourable outcome... or perhaps he punches, you miss the counter, you go put some ice on your nose. The fallacy of expanding time usually doesn't occur when one is in a competitive art, there is not a lot of time for extended counters and counter-counters when being thrown in judo or being hit in kendo, one movement is often all there is time for. But in arts where the practice is slowed down, in iaido or aikido for instance, one needs to be careful.

Because ZNKR seitei iaido can be done slowly, with more emphasis on correct form and posture than on speed, the student may get the idea that one can spend the time to draw forward, close the hand and then cut across with the back muscles

when the reality is that the last two movements actually occur in an overlap. Yes the hand is closed first but the shoulder starts moving before the hand finishes its movement.

Recently, I attended a seminar with a hanshi hachidan instructor. This, for those who don't know, is the top rank that exists in the kendo federation right now. These few people define what the art is, how it is practised and taught, so they are worth listening to. In this seminar I picked up three more counts for my examination of the initial draw and cut in iaido, otherwise known as nuki tsuke, and I will outline them below as counts 2, 3 and 4.



Fig 1

Here we begin the movement by sitting in seiza with the hands on the thighs. I will take this opportunity to do some self correction and say that the hands should be at the same position, having my right hand ahead of the left is a bit aggressive. The back could be a bit more straight as well, unless the top is not tucked in well enough. In either case it should be fixed. Perhaps I should cut myself some slack, I was posing for photographs and not performing the kata.

At this time the opponent (kasso teki) in front begins to make attacking movements or similar threats.



Fig 2

Count 1. The draw toward the opponent starts, the right hand comes on in this relaxed position and the left thumb releases the blade from the scabbard. As the blade is pushed out of the saya the hips drive forward (which of course means that

they will rise, but it is the forward movement that is important). The blade remains edge up.

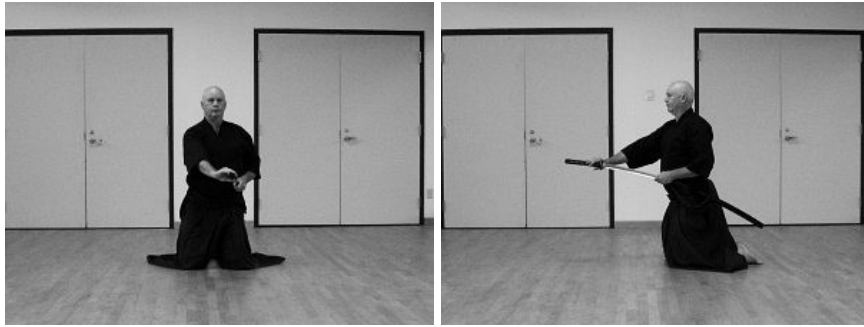


Fig 3

Count 2. Once the blade is half way drawn toward the opponent the toes flip under and the left hand turns the saya so that the blade moves into the correct position in the right hand for the cut.

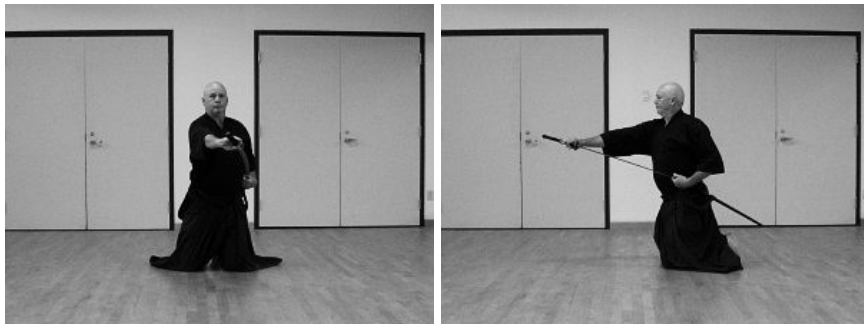


Fig 4

Count 3. This is called "saya banari" the position at which the blade is turned to the horizontal position, the toes are flipped down and the blade tip is just at the opening of the saya (the koiguchi). This is the final position at which the opponent can say "gomen", sorry, and the kata will finish without bloodshed. Of course this does not happen with our invisible enemy and the cut is made directly from the scabbard. This instant in time, saya banari or "breaking the scabbard" can be taken as the specific definition of iaido.

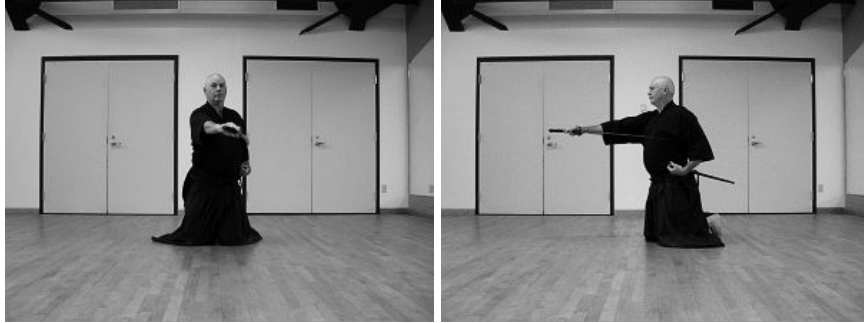


Fig 5

Count 4. I am an idiot, in this sequence we missed a step, where the little finger of the right hand pushes the tip of the blade up to shoulder height just as it is released from the koiguchi. I have inserted other images here to show what I mean, you can see the tip moving upward to horizontal.

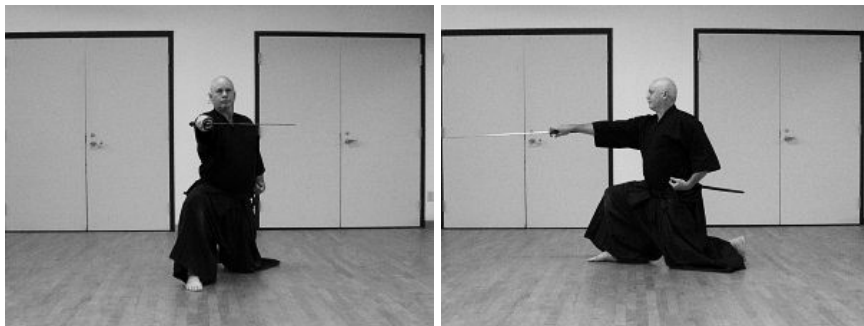


Fig 6

Count 5. The hand is closed so that the tip moves to the target. Note that in the photograph the hand is extended to its finishing position as the target is reached. This will make the next cutting movement weak as there is no way for the wrist to move except back from the cut. If the next movement is made just before this wrist position is reached, the maximum distance forward will be slightly less, but the power in the cut will be greatly increased.

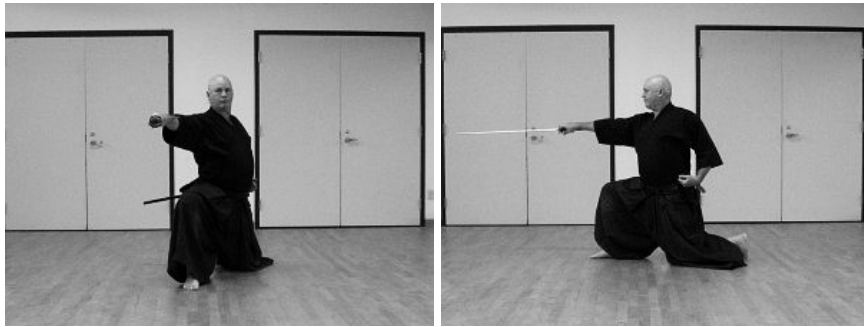


Fig 7

Count 6. Finally, the chest is opened and the lower part of the scapula is closed as a strong movement of the scabbard (*saya biki*) is made so that the tip cuts across the target. Note that the hips should be square to the opponent and the chest at about 45 degrees to the left front. The tip of the blade stops just outside of the target (the forehead or eyes) and so just in front of your right shoulder.

Breaking the *nuki tsuke* down to these six counts can be very useful to a beginner, as each body motion can be studied separately, but I hope that students of *iaido* will see the problem immediately. I stated above that cutting directly from the *koiguchi* to the target is the definition of *iaido*, The tip is released at *saya banari*, as the scabbard is broken (hopefully not actually broken since that would mean we just sliced our left palm), and the target cut immediately. This obviously can't happen if we release the tip at figure 4 and move it upward to figure 5 before cutting forward in figure 6. What we really need to do here is combine these two movements, the tip going forward and upward so that the tip moves on a diagonal angle directly from the scabbard to the target. If you examine figure 4 you will see that the line of the blade is more or less at this this angle.

So here we have several photographs which correspond with six counts of the draw and cut. Since this is a continuous movement (whether done slow or fast) these images and my counts are a lie. The breakdown can be of tremendous value to a student, but like most instructions, that breakdown must be understood for what it is. The function of the movement must never be far from the mind, and the function of *nuki tsuke* is to cut the target strongly, efficiently and at a distance from the body.

I would like to thank Lonita Fraser for selecting the articles for this book. I hope it has been of some use in the reader's practise of iai.

Kim Taylor, May, 2020