



"Gibbons reaching for the Moon"  
detail from a folding fan. (c. 1610)

The conduct of these events has given more Americans a view of what authentic swordsmanship looks like than ever before. The greatest compliment I have heard is that our competitors are on par with the Japanese events that have been seen. With that in mind we should mention that our own **Patrick Haley** distinguished himself from among many skilled competitors to earn third place in *Iai Kata (Nidan-Sandan)*. Also **Loren Kierstead** displayed his talent in the cutting events by placing in three of them. First place in *Futomaki*. Other Tucson friends also matched their skills with the field to great effect. **Chuck Hunicutt** took third in *Iai Kata (Yondan and above)* and **Dan Keupp** took third in the *Dodan* event. Mark your calendars for next year. I think we will have to take up the slack now that **Sensei Keupp** will be judging and no longer competing.

also be the simplicity of a training space that is well suited to serious practice without too much ornament.

The opposite of *Wabi Sabi* is often referred to as *Kiza*. This is a negative term that is sometimes translated as "snobbish, flashy or proud". At the heart of this word is the implication that whatever is being described as *Kiza* is "disturbing to the spirit". For the study of martial arts, this is something that is distracting to your purpose. A sword with too much gold and other "flash" will catch your eye when you should be focused on a technique. Clothing that is too bright or fussy will detract from your *waza* just as much as clothes that do not fit. Flashy equipment is also a quick way to spot a neophyte. This should serve as a warning flag that perhaps you are in the company of a person who does not have enough experience to practice safely.

The Japanese people also have a high regard for conformity and order. A famous phrase says it best. "*Deru Kugi Utareru*". The nail that sticks out will be hammered down. This is a cultural value that instructs people of all ages to keep others around them "in line". Non Japanese are often treated with more tolerance, but will still be reminded of their transgressions in some way.

## Events Schedule

**September 1** West Coast Tai Kai  
Costa Mesa, Ca



## Tai Kai W. C.

Several members of the *Yamakawa Dojo* Participated in the second annual West Coast *Tai Kai* in Costa Mesa, California. Once again there were many excellent seminars offered during the day on Friday followed by an evening *embu* with representatives of many major styles of Japanese swordsmanship. The events were hosted by the *Senpokan Dojo* of California and sponsored by the major sword suppliers in the United States. **Howard Clark** of Morgan Valley Forge has outdone himself again this year by donating a custom made *daisho* as the grand prize for the overall champion (*Yusho*). We are fortunate to have such generous support for our gatherings.

## Wabi Sabi and Kiza

The world of *Iai* is a conservative place. Most practitioners and teachers are dedicated to preserving the Japanese sword arts with the same level of gravity and respect as their teachers. Also, many of us endeavor to learn about the cultural values of Japan that are woven into all of the aspects of *Iai* training. There are a few Japanese terms that help us understand traditional *Dojo* attitudes.

The first is *Wabi Sabi*. Often translated as "Subdued Elegance", this phrase describes a beauty that is subtle and inspiring at the same time. In the *dojo* this can be attributed to a very well made sword that has practical fittings and a subdued color on the *saya*. This could

## More Monkeys

There are some more connections between the monkey and Japanese culture worth mentioning. Besides being one of the messengers of the *Kami*, monkeys are also symbols of protection. The Japanese word for monkey, *Saru*, is a homonym for another Japanese word "*Saru*" which means dispel, push away. In particular, a red monkey can be seen on some traditional buildings as a part of the defense against bad spirits. Further, the *kanji* for (*Kami / Shin*) "folk deity" is composed of two elements that can be read separately as a representation of "manifestation monkey".



The first part is from *Ji / shimesu* (to show) and the second part is *Shin / mosu* to say. But the second symbol can also be recognized as the one used for the **monkey** in the Japanese Zodiac.

神

KAMI, Meaning Shinto "folk deity"  
This character consists of two elements:

示 "to show"

申 "to say" or  
"monkey of the zodiac"

In the Tendai Shinto Tradition, the monkey is thus the manifestation of the Sanno Deity.

Incidentally, the second reading of *Kami* is , "*Shin*" which is familiar to all of us as a "word" meaning; Spirit, Heart, New, Say, True, **Mind** or Thoughts, depending on which *kanji* is used.

So, not only is a monkey mind something we all poses, but it is also a hidden feature of the Japanese *Kanji* for the spirits.

There is another interesting folk practice in Japan that has been used for the protection of a house and its occupants. A red "substitution monkey", **Migawari Zaru** doll hung on the eaves of a house serves as a kind of lightning rod for evil. The monkey doll, it is said, will be punished instead of the person who is intended or deserving. A bit like shooting the messenger, the monkey doll takes the hit instead. Naughty monkey.

One last interesting bit of monkey lore. Women in Japan hoping to conceive a child can purchase special **Saru Mata**, "Monkey underwear" that is reputed to invoke the fertility power the monkey as a patron of safe child birth and harmonious marriage. Their red color is said to simulate a female monkey in estrus.

## Swords in Japan

Some have wondered why swords made in Japan remain so expensive while others making swords around the world can do it for so much less. It can not be merely a matter of the differences in wages and overhead. In fact there are many reasons. The major one is government regulation. The Japanese government specifies that real steel *Nihonto* in Japan can only be created by licensed sword smiths. Further, these smiths are not allowed to make more than two long swords a month and they must be crafted from *Tamahagane* sand (Much more time consuming). Like many things Japanese, the process is as important as the product. They are preserving the art of the Japanese sword as it has been made for hundreds of years. Therefore they do not allow new swords to be made or licensed that do not conform to these high standards. All steel swords in Japan must be registered and the paperwork (*Torokusho*) must accompany the sword at all times. Foreign made steel swords are definitely not eligible for a Japanese license and would be confiscated and destroyed.



*Iaito* are not in the same category as "real swords". Practice blades are made from aluminum alloy that can not be sharpened to the level of a steel blade. Because of this they are relatively inexpensive and are not treated like a firearm by Japanese authorities.

