



The Fox Woman, Kuzunoha, Leaving her Child

Yoshitoshi, Tsukioka, (1839 – 1892)

Events Schedule

2009

July 13 - 17	Sword Smithing Guelph, Ontario
August 6 - 8	Florida Tai Kai Orlando, FL (USFBD)
August 7 - 9	Niten Ryu Seminar Guelph, Ontario
August 14 -16	Seitei Seminar Guelph, Ontario

Pima Enbu

The members of the *Yamakawa Dojo* performed **two Enbu** for the Pima County Community College this year. First, as a kind of “warm up”, we did an outdoor display at the North Campus during their Asia and Pacific Island Matsuri Festival. This was performed at the very modern outdoor amphitheater to an appreciative few. None the less it was a good experience for our members to experience the pressure of a public venue.

Later in the week, we presented a full program of *Kata*, *Kumitachi* and *Tameshigiri* during the **seventh annual** Pima College

Japanese Speech Contest. This year we had the advantage of using the proscenium stage in the Performing Arts Center. We had ample ceiling clearance, good lighting and acoustics.

The event organizer and language instructor *Sugawara Sensei*, was very kind again this year and provided gift bags to all of the participants. It has also been discovered that the Audio Visual Department was filming the contest for broadcast on the Pima Educational Channel. We may be able to get DVD copies of the contest and our sword demonstration. This was perhaps the best program yet, by the Pima College language department. The event was extremely well organized and enjoyable. There were even several audience participation events with prizes that cultivated an atmosphere of lighthearted fun.



American Shinto

In Washington State, there is a large community of Japanese Americans who also take advantage of the religious freedom in this country to continue their Shinto practices. Many other Americans have also found this creed appealing and have been welcomed by the *Tsubaki Grand Shrine of America*. Located in Granite Falls, Washington just outside of Seattle this shrine serves North America. It is directly affiliated with *Tsubaki Grand Shrine of the Ise Region, Japan*.

Many *Iai* practitioners have also taken the opportunity to investigate the spiritual roots of the *Samurai* in *Shinto*. For some it is a daily or weekly practice associated with their swordsmanship. Among others, it may be a source of proper Japanese accoutrements for the *Dojo*. Either way, it is a relevant passage to understanding Japanese culture more deeply.

Our group in Tucson has been fortunate over the past several years to have *Sensei* (Ken) Wintin, to guide us in all things related to ceremony and etiquette. His life experiences in Japan and among the martial arts community has given him an excellent sense of Japanese right and wrong. I believe that his prayers and ceremonies have brought our experiences in *Iai* to a higher level of authenticity and enjoyment.



Fumibari Blades

A feature of many old sword blades from feudal Japan is an overt taper in the area towards the *Tsuba*. Not only is there an increase of the width, but there also may be a pronounced thickening of the blade just before it enters the *Habaki*. The current literature refers to this as *Fumibari*, but what does that really mean? *Fumibari* is also the name for a **needle** in Japanese. Interestingly, a traditional needle in Japan has much more of a wedge shape near the eyelet, so until you see the artifact, this term may not make much sense. Several sources have suggested that this shape provided a much needed boost to the resiliency of a blade meant for combat. Modern analytical methods confirm that a likely region of failure would be near the *Ha Machi / Mune Machi* “step”, especially if this was made with a sharp inner corner. A loose fitting *Habaki* may also contribute to premature metal failure. It is also worth mentioning that this is a marginal area of a Japanese sword’s temper. On some blades, especially on a re-tempered sword, a *Mizukage* may be seen. This is a diagonal region in the area of the *Habaki* that shows the limit of the water surface during the quenching process. The reason that you may not see this on a sword that has only been tempered once is that the raw tempered sword has quite a bit of metal removed during the base shaping and polishing. A blade that is being reworked will not be polished as deeply afterwards and will likely show evidence of the re-tempering process.

Another often observed feature of older blades is the lack of a sharp edge close to the *Habaki*. This is not a hard and fast rule but there are several reasons why this may not be found consistently. Certainly, many swords were sharpened repeatedly throughout their history. This would provide various opportunities for the entire edge to be touched up. Also a great number of *Tachi* and other long blades were shortened for legal, practical or aesthetic reasons. This would undoubtedly have moved the *Habaki* into an area that had previously held a keen edge and lacked the

Fumibari reinforcement. It has also been suggested that as a blade became “tired” the *Togishi* (Sword Polisher) would perhaps, leave the *Habaki* area alone, once again creating a tapered width blade and not requiring a new fitting.

Most modern swords are made with a **keen finish along the entire cutting edge, but is that wise or necessary?** Perhaps it is an artifact of the manufacturing process that can just as easily sharpen the whole edge. We have seen copper and brass *Habaki* that have obviously been damaged during installation over a sharp edge. We know that manufactured swords are often “persuaded” to fit together much more often than a true hand fitted masterpiece. It may also be important to consider the safety aspects of maintaining a razor’s edge under your left hand. If a blade slides loose and out of control, the first area that is exposed is near the *Habaki*.

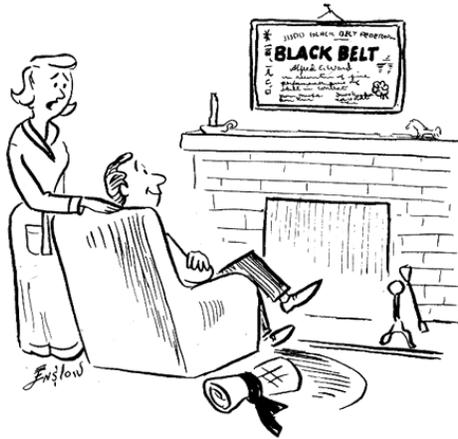
We all know by now, that a majority of efficient cutting action occurs at the *Monouchi* section of the blade. There are variations and exceptions, but there is almost no speed or cutting power to be had near the *Tsuba*. In fact, if you ever send your sword to be polished for practical purposes rather than aesthetics, they will likely only sharpen the distal section. Likewise, I have never heard of a *Tameshigiri* demonstration failing due to the unused edge being too dull.

Modern Rank

The prolific martial arts writer Donn Draeger was quite adept at explaining the arcane origins of many of the traditions of the modern *Dojo*. He gave a speech in 1976 that explained in depth his understanding of the origins of the Black Belt and colored belt system in the martial arts. Most importantly, he points out that the whole idea of earning a belt that signifies some sort of mastery is a modern contrivance that may only go back to 1883 with the beginnings of Dr. *Kano*’s modern *Judo*. Certainly Japan is a rank conscious society, but in order to understand the underpinnings of *Kobudo* rank you must first discard your Western frame of reference.

Superior to any rank that could be earned in Japanese society there was first a system of social class that would keep some from ever training in a martial discipline. That and a few other expedient items like earning enough money for you and your family to

live during challenging times. So, the first hurdle throughout much of Japanese history was to be born into a social class that had the time and resources to allow you to dedicate yourself to perfecting a non-productive skill. During the *Tokugawa* Era, this meant that you had to belong to the *Samurai* class or the aristocracy. The education of the *Samurai* children has been documented as quite regimented and rigorous. *Samurai* class children were very quickly organized into training units of their peers (*Goju*). Older children had leadership and discipline duties and younger children had extra obligations to their group. So, the next level of hierarchy in a group is typically age. Concurrent with age is also the pursuit of “certification” in various skills. In old Japan this was the *Menkyo* system. For the most part it acknowledges a beginning, a middle and a final training (*Menkyo*). Really, you were either trained or untrained. Other differentiations were determined rather quickly based on how long you survived and the number of heroic deeds you could be recognized and rewarded for performing.



"I'm going to bed now. Don't sit up all night looking at it."

The modern conceit is that somehow anyone can achieve total mastery by taking lessons in the evenings and weekends over the course of a year or two.

The *Shin Shin Ryu* is a *Kobudo* art. Our most important distinctions are *Shoden*, *Chuden* and *Okuden*. These are the big steps that signal different stages of complete training. In parallel to this measurement is the possibility of earning a teaching license (*Renshi*). This is a separate area that some may not pursue. Typically, a student must have the skills and training of a *Chuden* to start instructing others. It is only after “apprenticing” with a recognized teacher that you may be considered for a *Renshi* license.

Also among the teaching licenses there are distinctions that indicate greater bureaucratic and organizational responsibilities and are also a measure of the length of service to the *Ryu*. (*Renshi*, *Kyoshi*, *Hanshi*)



Tea and Life

Part of the way of tea is giving the participants subtle clues that put them in the right frame of mind for a good tea ceremony. If you are lucky enough to visit a tea house that is part of a traditional garden, you may see a water basin with running water spilling into it. The smaller, shorter version that is outside of a tea house is called a *Tsukubai* (Crouching Bowl). Above is a *Tsukubai* made of stone standing on a bed of drainage stones. The origin of this garden feature is reputed to be the *Chozubachi* found outside of temples and shrines. The function of a *Chozubachi* is to serve as a place where worshipers can wash their hands and rinse their mouths before entering a sacred building. This actually serves as the first purification ritual for someone who has the intention of purifying their mind. The tea community adopted this device for much the same reason, but they made the *Tsukubai* very short (less than 12 inches) to emphasize humility.

This particular stone (*Ryoanji* Temple, *Kyoto*) once belonged to the feudal lord *Tokugawa* (*Mito*), *Mitsukuni* and has a unique overlapping inscription; 吾唯足知

I learn only to be contented.

“All I know is how much is enough”

This is an important concept from Zen philosophy. It is said that “He, who learns only to be contented is spiritually rich, while the one who does not learn to be contented is spiritually poor, even if he is materially wealthy.”

