



Octopus Games

Kuniyoshi, Utagawa (1797 – 1861)

Events Schedule

2010	
January 5	Senbon Suburi Stone Dojo
January 9	TCM Demo Tucson Children's Museum
January 9	Kagami Biraki Magee Dojo
Feb 26, 27	Tucson Tai Kai Tucson, AZ

Kagami Biraki

Please join us for a celebration of the new training year and all around great time at the *Yamakawa Dojo* and the home of Joan and Dr. (Shihan) Mark Gettings. Once again they have generously opened up their house for the annual festivities that start the New Year with a celebration of our community. **Saturday January 9th at 6:00PM** we will meet at the house and socialize until most people have arrived. Then there will be a short ceremony

in the *Dojo* and a round of appreciation for our teachers.

Traditional beverages are usually in good supply and guests often bring special snacks, appetizers, or deserts to share.

Tucson Tai Kai

Soon the ballroom of the Tucson Holiday Inn will be filled with the *Kiai* of traditional Japanese sword *Kata* and the “*Snick*” sound of *Goza* being sliced to ribbons. The Tucson *Tai Kai* will be held this year over the last weekend of February, 2010. *Soke Yamada* of the *Shin Shin Ryu* will again be the head judge and master of ceremonies and *Kaicho McClafferty* is expected back to the United States from his service in Afghanistan.

This year promises several changes that are meant to simplify the event and make it more affordable in these lean economic times. This year there is a move back to the essential experiences of a *Tai Kai*. Interesting seminars and the main long-sword *Tameshigiri* events are the focus. Most important, it is an opportunity to spend time with likeminded sword practitioners from across America who value the traditions and skills of “Old Japan”. Up to date information and details are once again available on the [Swordforum International, JSA Events](#) pages.



Tuesday Practices

Each week the *Yamakawa Dojo* has a two practice sessions. For years, the Saturday morning practice has been held at the *Dojo* on Magee behind Dr. Gettings' house and the weekday practice has been in town, closer to the University of Arizona. This fall the **regular weekday practice was shifted to Tuesday evenings**. Practice begins at 6:30 PM but on Tuesday the Stone Ave *Dojo* is currently open for individual practice before class. If students are available before class time they are welcome to warm up or practice in the open space. This session currently overlaps with one of the regular meetings of the *Ryu Shin Kan Dojo* (Tucson Central) and this allows members of the *Yamakawa Dojo*

to spend some practice time with other Tucson students to exchange ideas and training techniques.



Year of the Tiger

Kano-e-Tora (庚寅) Yang Metal-Tiger begins on February 15th in 2010. This is also the 22nd year of the *Heisei era* (平成) which began in 1989 with the reign of **Emperor Akihito** of Japan. A quick way to convert the current year to *Heisei* is to take the last two digits and add 12. For the year 2010, take 10+12 and get *Heisei 22*.



The name “*Heisei*” was taken from two Chinese history and philosophy books. *Records of the Grand Historian* (史記 *Shiji*) and the *Classic of History* (書經 *Shujing*). In the *Shiji*, the sentence “内平外成” (peace inside and prosperity outward) appears in a section honoring the wise rule of the legendary Chinese Emperor *Shun*. In the *Shujing*, the sentence “地平天成” (the land is peaceful and the sky is clear) appears. By combining both meanings, *Heisei* is intended to mean “**peace everywhere**”. The *Heisei* era went into effect immediately after the announcement of the new emperor on January 8, 1989.

Tanuki

Excerpt from "Japanese Buddhist Statuary"

There are countless tales about the mischievous *Tanuki*. The *Tanuki* can transform into any living or inanimate shape, but in legend it often assumes the form of a monk or a tea kettle to play tricks on people. Real *Tanuki* live in the lowlands, forests and mountain valleys, and in legends, the mythical *Tanuki* is most often shown playing tricks on hunters and woodsmen. They can cast powerful illusions -- they can turn leaves into fake money or horse excrement into a delicious-looking dinner. The *Tanuki* is said to love Japanese *Sake* (rice wine), and is often depicted with a *Sake* bottle in one hand (usually purchased with fake money made from leaves) and a promissory note in the other

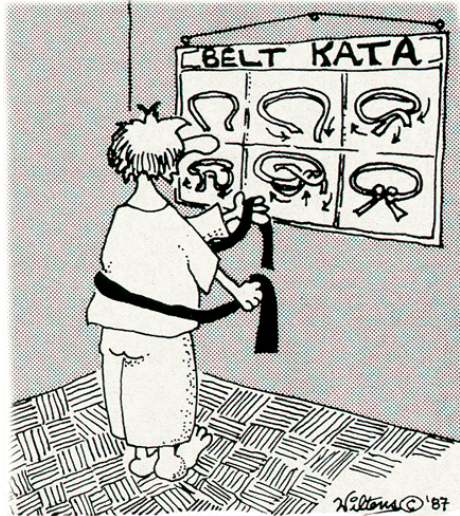


A curious and defining characteristic of *Tanuki* is its gigantic testes. In Japanese slang, these are known as *Kinbukuro* 金袋, or "money bags." The magical *Tanuki* loves drinking and eating, and statues of this creature often stand outside bars and eateries, beaconing visitors to enter. Some therefore say that *Tanuki*'s big testes are a reminder not to be stingy. By extension, it is no stretch of the imagination to consider the *Tanuki* to be over-sexed.

In other legends, the testicles / scrotum can be stretched to the size of eight tatami mats. Others point to the word *Senjojiki* (the space of 1,000 tatami mats) as an indication of the *Tanuki*'s testes size. Called *Kin-tama* 金玉 (Golden Jewels) in Japanese, the testes are supposedly symbols of good luck rather than overt sexual symbols (the Japanese are more tolerant of low humor than most Western nations). In the Japanese movie *Heisei Tanuki Gassen Ponpoko*, the *Tanuki* stretches out its scrotum as a parachute in a desperate suicide attack. In other *Tanuki*

folklore, the *Tanuki* uses the testes as an impromptu drum.

On some statues of *Tanuki*, *Hachi* is written on the *Sake* bottle. The symbol on the *Tanuki*'s sake bottle is also identical to the emblem (adopted in 1907) of *Nagoya* City. The symbol was used by the rulers of the *Nagoya* area in feudal days. It is the Japanese character "*Hachi*," which means "eight," and it stands for the eight districts controlled by the *Nagoya* clan in those bygone days.



German Steel

The Tozando Supply Company of Japan has finally decided that it was time to offer traditionally made steel swords with proper Japanese fittings and furniture to compliment their range of fine alloy *Iaito*.

<http://www.e-japanesesword.net/>

Many of our current members have purchased their training equipment from Japan at considerable expense and delay. Often there are nuances of material, weave and color that only seem authentic when they come from the true source of Japanese swordsmanship. Likewise, sword blades and fittings from Japan still stand apart from the flood of replicas that have been created in other parts of Asia.

The ultimate goal of many long-time students is to proficiently wield an authentic *Nihonto*. In our *Dojo*, Dr. Gettings suggests that *Sandan* and above strive to use sharp swords at least 50% of the time for *Iai* practice. The sharp blade is a real reminder to focus on perfecting technique over brute

force or power. Before this level, it may be unwise to experience the common mistakes of *Iai* with a sharp blade. None the less, students are expected to treat their training swords with the respect and care of a sharp blade at all times.

In Japan a true *Nihonto* is subject to several built in restrictions that make them prohibitively expensive. Sword smiths in Japan are limited in the total number of swords that they may produce in a year. Also, in Japan they must use the folk-craft produced *Tamahagane* steel to build the foundation of the blade. This and other economic factors keep the price of swords made in Japan extremely high.

We have all heard about or experienced first-hand the "spotty" results from China. The Chinese made swords have gotten better over time, but most fall short in fit and finish. There is also a wide range of quality among the same model month to month. Quality control is not a *forte* from these companies right now. While the German made swords are not nearly as inexpensive as the Chinese replicas, perhaps with the Japanese company calling the shots, all of the important details will be correct.



The Tozando blades are being made in Germany (Known for manufacturing quality) by a small family of sword makers and all of the fittings and woven goods are sourced from Japan. Much like their custom *Iaito*, there are the important options that we have all come to expect of fine swords. The "correct" length for your style or body size is available up to 2.8 *Shaku*. The blade thickness (*Motokasane*) and *Sori* and a choice of *Hamon*. The *Tsuka* length is specified to fit your hands as well as the color choices that are fun to make. The *Tsuka-maki* and lacquer work is reportedly done under the supervision of Japanese specialists.

