

My Iaido(Training, Research, and My Belief)

I entered junior high school in 1927, and started learning kendo and got 3 Dan in August 1933. I taught kendo as an assistant teacher for 4 months at the junior high school then I joined the army in Manchuria in December 1933. I became a military policeman in 1935 and started to educate military policemen in April, 1936. I kept teaching until August 1945. When Japan became a defeated nation of the Pacific War I became a prisoner in Russia. I only came back to Japan in December 1949. I learned Iaido, only Seiza No Bu, before joining the army. I started practising Iaido very hard in 1957 when I was 43 years old.

1) Training

Soon after coming back to Japan in 1949 I restarted my kendo practice. I heard there was very traditional Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu in Kochi led by a Soke. I also wanted to learn Iaido and I knew Koda Morio sensei who had just come back from Taiwan. I started to learn kendo and Iaido under him. Koda sensei graduated from a special Budo school and had been fortunate to have a 7-day Iaido "lecture" by Oe sensei. I heard he had forgotten some parts of Oe sensei's Iaido and taught his own style. So I decided to go to Kochi to learn Iaido.

In May 1957 I attended the Kyoto Taikai. On my way home I met Fukui Harumasa sensei (the 19th Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu Soke), Yamamoto Takuji sensei and Taoka Tsutau sensei purely by chance.

Soon after I met them I asked Yamamoto Takuji sensei to teach me and I started to visit Kochi in August 1957. I learned all the waza and found out all the things about the old and new Kochi Iaido by asking them. I learned Iaido there for 5 and a half years.

Then I studied under Mori Shigeki sensei of Matsuyama until he passed away in 1988. Mori sensei started to learn under Oe sensei when he was a junior high school student. He studied under Oe sensei until he passed away in 1927.

A) Yamamoto Takuji sensei's Iaido

He learned iaido under Oe sensei for about 6 years until Oe sensei passed away. Takuji sensei was not so young when he learned Oe sensei's iaido. He acquired Oe sensei's last iaido thoroughly.

B) How I learned under Yamamoto Takuji sensei

For the first 3 months he didn't explain at all. He demonstrated the 11 waza of Seiza No BU, then I demonstrated them. We did this in turns. I learned his iaido without asking. Three months later, he explained the reasons briefly. He taught me Seiza No Bu for 1 year then he decided I could start to learn Tate Hiza No Bu.

I visited Kochi every Sunday. I arrived at the dojo, Chido Kan, at around 9:30 in the morning and left after 3 o'clock in the afternoon. I travelled by train each way. I practiced for 5 or 6 hours each time.

While I was practicing under Takuji sensei Fukui Harumasa sensei, Taoka Tsutau sensei and Shimazaki Teruyuki san gathered and watched me practicing. Shimazaki san owned a martial art shop. He was always with Oe sensei until Oe sensei passed away. While Takuji sensei was taking a break, they called me over and gave me additional lessons. I remember I had very little breaks during my practice.

I learned all 45 waza during these 3 years. My teacher said, "You don't need to come any more. You have finished." However I asked him to teach me more. I went to Kochi for 2 and a half years more. We did all the 45 for about 1 hour and I listened to them each time. I listened to all the traditional Kochi iaido stories they knew. Later this helped me a lot. I feel the long years of practice were really good.

Takuji sensei passed away in 1977. He was 92 years old.

C) How I learned under Mori Shigeki sensei

After the Kochi I started to visit Mori sensei in Matsuyama to get his comments and guidance once every 2 months. Maybe he liked my iaido attitude because he sometimes visited me. He also came to Kanonji to teach me and my comrades.

Mori sensei respected Takuji sensei's teachings. He said repeatedly "You have learned the most dynamic Tosa (Kochi) gihou(technique). He said to adopt the dynamic iaido but pointed out that Oe sensei's iaido was half-dynamic and half-graceful." I remember he encouraged me, and then added his own iaido teaching.

Later he became disabled and moved to his child's house in Nagoya. I was sure to visit him once in every 2 or 3 months and talked on various topics all day long. He was delighted very much. He passed away on 29 May 1988. He was 97 years old. My teachers lived long.

D) My Koden research

I learned Tosa iaido under Yamamoto Takuji sensei, Fukui Harumasa sensei, Taoka Tsutau sensei and Shimazaki Teruyuki san. I thought I should write an outline of waza mae that I learned in Kochi so as not to forget them in the future. That was when I started to write books. I named it "SHI DEN KAI KO-TOSA NO EISHIN RYU" (this is my red book). I also started to write articles. It was necessary to study Koryu thoroughly enough to write a book. I started to trace the origin of Koryu.

I started to study the books by Kono Hyakuren sensei. He was taught specially by Hokiyaama Namio sensei (the 18th Soke). After Hokiyaama sensei passed away, he was taught by Fukui Harumasa sensei (the 19th Soke). He had enough practical training and studied the reasons very much. He redoubled his efforts to study Koryu and became the 20th Soke. One of his books is the explanation of the practice of the 45 waza. Another one is the study of Koryu. In his last years he deplored the iaido with wrong ideas and wrote a book, TAN I ROKU. He published several excellent books. He did his best to teach the iaido people of the time (i.e. Showa). I read these

books and practiced every day. That helped me a lot to finish Kochi practice. I was enlightened very much by them. I felt I started to gain firm confidence by the lessons by Yamamoto sensei and the study of Kono sensei's books.

E) Nippon Budo Shinbun (Newspaper)

Nippon Budo Shinbun was published in Kyoto at that time. Many ideas about budo and the present budo situation appeared in the newspapers. There were various kinds of individual opinions among them. I thought of contributing articles. I thought someone would answer my questions and teach me. I started to contribute every month for 4 years from 1963. My article appeared almost every month. However, I was disappointed in my expectations. I did not get any answers. On the contrary I had a bad reputation, I was regarded as "an impertinent fellow" so I stopped. I was around 50 years old then. I was thinking of reasonable iaido day and night and wrote without reserve, freely. It was very useful to me to write books. I published these as an at-random commentary iaido book, TANBO KAIKO (this in my blue book).

F) Soda Torahiko sensei the 16th, Shimomura Ha

Soda Torahiko sensei learned under Yukimune Sadayoshi sensei the 5th Soke of the Shimomura Ha. He was a Shimomura Ha expert and had the copies of the reference materials of Yukimune sensei. He was an excellent Shimomura Ha teacher. I heard his son lived in Tokyo. I asked him about the copy of the reference materials on iaido. He kindly gave me the copies he had.

There were very valuable articles from Oe sensei's students, including Shimomura Ha and Tanimura Ha teachers' articles that were contributed in Nippon Budo Shinbun in 1926. Moreover there were copies of Yukimune sensei's writings about Shimomura Ha Koden, commonly called Muso Shinden Shigenobu Ryu Record. Soda sensei copied them. They were really useful and I studied them a lot. There were Nakanishi sensei's articles and a man who was from Kochi contributed from Manchuria.

By many reference materials, I could know the Kochi iaido teachers' activities and the development of the study about iaido in Kochi. I appreciated these precious copies and I put some of them in my book, TANBO KAIKO.

G) Research into the old traditional books

a) Research into the book, KENDO SYUUGI

KENDO SYUUGI was written by Yamada Jirokichi sensei, a kendo teacher at Tokyo Commercial University. I knew the book had many useful old writings when I was contributing to Nippon Budo Shinbun. I asked my friend to buy one for me. He graduated from Tokyo Commercial University.

I started to research into the book. There were a lot of explanations about budo ryu ha (budo schools), a lot of Kubota Sugane sensei's writings, GORIN NO SHO, and so on. There were a lot of original texts in the book. I researched into the book and extracted the useful parts for iai and published in book form. I named the book IAIDO SHUUGI (the green book), the third that I published.

Kubota sensei was a teacher of KOUBUSHO, a kind of school, in the last days of the Tokugawa shogunate. There were a lot of useful explanations about the old traditional kendo and iaido techniques to teach. His book was very helpful to study techniques.

b) Research into GORIN NO SHO

I found GORIN NO SHO explained by Kobayashi Ichiro in a second hand bookstore in Kyoto in 1988. I studied it with my whole heart. He explained the book as one of the old traditional books. However, the explanations are like ones by a martial artist. I have never read such a good book as this. I keenly realized we should study and practice kendo and iaido aiming at GORIN NO SHO as our object. I often reread it even now.

2) Research by reading various books.

You can learn MUSO JIKIDEN EISHIN RYU techniques well enough, if you study the books by Kono Hyakuren sensei very hard. However, you can't learn mentality well enough, even if you study iaido writings very much. Yamaoka Tesshu sensei, a famous 19th century swordsman, calligrapher and statesman, finally completed his kendo by Zen.

After learning in Kochi, I thought of mental training. I tried to find good books. I read the books on Zen by Suzuki Taisetsu sensei. I read KEN AND ZEN, YUMI AND ZEN, and so on. Mental explanations are very useful to improve techniques. However, there weren't so many good books to help techniques. I read a book about Noh play (drama) and I was impressed. Noh has been keeping its old tradition strictly, and the people have been putting old things into practice. They have admonished the changes of the body movement.

3) Study techniques and reasons by adopting the ideas in the newspapers and magazines.

We can find the articles about the people who succeeded technically by making efforts. Their mental processes through their efforts are very similar to ours. When we read about their achievements, we can adopt their experience to improve our iaido. I always look for articles like these. I try to keep useful things in my mind. Of course I can't keep all of them, but I try to keep them in my mind. I also enjoy reading the books. I often go to the bookstore. I was impressed the most by Mr. Matsushita Konosuke, the first (Matsushita) Panasonic president. By his achievement and words and deeds, we can learn a lot. He studied by himself not at schools. His words, deeds and mentality are very useful for us.

4) It is very important to have high hopes preserving the iaido tradition forever.

We need to have high hopes to preserve the traditional techniques and put them into practice. Good tradition should be handed down to future generations. We should consider deeply that our iaido was developed and refined by our ancestors hundreds years ago. They built iaido for their lives. Iaido is one of the best Japanese traditions. High-level students should have the ideas like this.

5) To be right-minded is very important to improve techniques.

Iaido is one of DO. We should be right-minded and keep practicing. I tried to train keeping right-minded and adopted anything useful. I worked for 9 years in the office of the late Prime Minister Ohira Masayoshi. I watched him doing right any time. I learned a lot by his personality. He learned old humanitarianism by the books Yasuoka Masahiro sensei wrote. I read them too. It is very important to be right-minded to learn iaido, to pass it down to the next generation and to devote ourselves to it. We become right-minded and pray to God. We should be right-minded to learn iaido, too.

The above statement is the outline of my iaido learning and my belief. This is my long study of the iaido way. Improving techniques is the same as completing humanity. Namely, improving techniques means trying self-accomplishment. When I look back over my way I feel gratitude for many people. I am moved by various memories. I really pray our iaido will pass down correctly from generation to generation.