



THE EMERGENCE OF THE JAPANESE SWORD

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Editor's Note: The reader will find the art of iai-do (sword-drawing way) illustrated and described in the section called Illustrated Techniques. In order that he who is interested in iai-do may begin training in a correct manner, it is absolutely necessary for him to have a working knowledge of the technical nomenclature of the Japanese sword. Otake Risuke, kenshi (expert swordsman) and shihan (master teacher) of the Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu offers this basic article on the background of the Japanese sword, and a short technical discussion on the terminology that is needed by all trainees of swordsmanship.

ALL living things have an "instinct" for struggle. Animals have pointed nails and tusks, teeth, strong horns, paws or hind legs which have a very positive weapon-like strength when brought into use. Even the most domesticated of animals frequently use the natural parts of their bodies as weapons with which to defend themselves, or to attack that which startles them. Human beings learned to fight effectively with tools or weapons in preference to

making use of the natural parts of their body simply because there is more effect generated, both in range and in force of impact, when instruments are used as weapons.

It is proved by archaeologists that in man's primitive eras of existence that clubs and other instruments were devised by making them of bone, horn, wood, or stone. Throwing-stones were used for a considerably long period of time before man learned that by making use of the elasticity of a branch of wood that he could greatly increase both the cast range and speed, and, thereby, the effect of his missile. Such a discovery led to the invention of the bow, useful not only in combat, but in providing food for the hunter; man's sense of timidity made missile weapons of all types his favorite instruments for defense.

Man also employed such weapons as he could operate at a "middle distance" from the target. The *naginata*, a halberd, is such a weapon. But it is those lethal weapons that are used at close-range against the enemy that stimulated man's deepest sense of

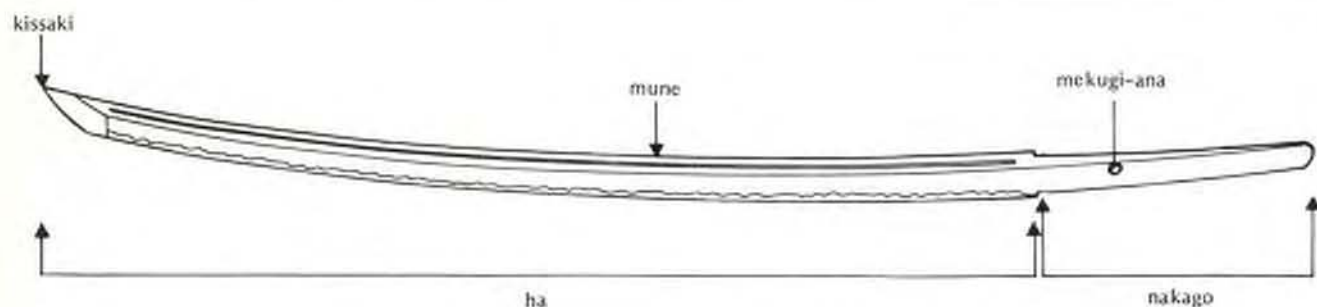
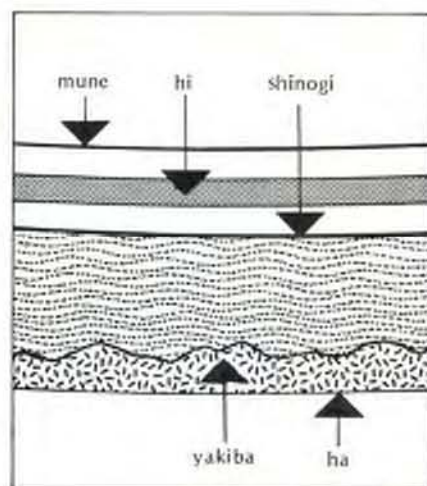
courage (and fear), as well as his resourcefulness in combat. The sword was the most important of this kind of close-range weapon. When man's knowledge of metallurgy permitted him to do so, he designed swords such as outmoded his earliest models made of wood, copper, stone, bone, or bronze. Through improved methods of forging man discovered the two necessary qualities of a good sword must always be its durability and its ability to be given and hold a keen edge.

The Japanese *bushi* (classical warrior) made the single-edge, curved sword his central weapon. It became his living soul, an object of veneration integrally attached to Japanese culture; a position that it retains in the twentieth-century Japanese society. One of the types of this kind of Japanese sword is the *katana*, and it is this weapon that is used in *iai-jutsu* (sword-drawing art) and in *iai-do* (sword-drawing way). An exponent of either of these martial disciplines must understand certain terms if he is to develop his skill properly and become an accomplished swordsman.

THE BLADE

The point of the blade is called *kissaki*. Its edge along its convex cutting surface is called *ha*. The concave back portion of the blade is the *mune*. Along each side of its body, and approximately paralleling the cutting edge and back lines of the sword, is the ridgeline or the *shinogi*; this surface is the highest point on the sides of the sword body as seen from a cross-sectional view. Some swords possess

grooves, or *hi*, which run lengthwise on the blade above the ridgeline. The tempered line which runs the length of the cutting edge is called a *yaki-ba*, and is the hardest portion of the steel in that blade. The portion of the blade which fits into the handle is called the *nakago*, which may be called "tang" in English. The rivet hole, or holes, that are found drilled through every tang are called *mekugi-ana*. A short peg fitted into the handle, and extending through this hole and to the other side of the handle holds the handle to the blade.



THE MOUNTINGS

The sheath or scabbard is called *saya*. It's mouth, or open end, is *koiguchi*; its butt end *kojiri*. The *saya* is fitted with a small chestnut-shaped projection near its open end which is called *kurigata*. A length of silk cord, or *sageo*, is strung through an opening in the *kurigata*, but is not always used in some styles of *iai-do*. The blade itself is fitted with a handguard or *tsuba*. Fitted like a collar on the blade, and in position just below the *tsuba*, is the *habaki*. The *seppa*, or spacers, are thin metal plates which are placed below the *tsuba* (between *habaki* and *tsuba*) and above the *tsuba* (between *tsuba* and handle proper). The handle of the sword, or hilt, is called *tsuka*; fitted to its fore-end (nearest *tsuba*) is a metal sleeve called *fuchi*; fitted

at its butt-end is the *kashira*, another metal sleeve or cap. The *mekugi* is the small peg mentioned earlier which is put through the *mekugi-ana* of the handle where it functions to hold the handle in place on the tang of the blade.

These terms are the minimum number of technical words that every swordsman must know; both exponents of *iai-jutsu* and *iai-do* will find these terms indispensable to their study and training.

