



European Workshop of the Two Swords School
Stage Européen de l'Ecole des Deux Sabres

兵法二天一流

Hyoho Niten Ichi Ryu

The School of Two Swords

Musashi's teachings – philosophy first

During a workshop organized by NGUYEN Thanh Thiên, we had the opportunity to meet Master IWAMI Toshio, 11th successor of Hyoho Niten Ichi Ryu (Musashi's legendary sword school), and ask him some questions.

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DRAGON: What is the teaching approach of your school?

Master IWAMI: First, you must learn “kokoro”, the heart. If you do not understand “kokoro”, then you should not wield your sword.

In ancient days at the dojo, a student of Niten Ryu first learned Ito, single sword techniques. Today, at the dojo, we study 7 techniques, no more no less, based on Ito. The two sword techniques, Nito, were considered “okuden”, or secret. The Master only taught these techniques in private, outside the confines of the dojo. It has been only recently that Nito techniques have been taught in a dojo and can now be seen during public demonstrations. A few years ago, I met Philippe (NGUYEN Thanh Thiên). I gave him and continue to give him “keiko”, or training, in Japan. Thanks to the numerous keiko Philippe has endured, we were able to organize a workshop here in France.

DRAGON: How many types of techniques are taught in your school?

M. IWAMI: There are many categories: one-sword techniques, two-sword techniques, Kodachi (short sword), Ju-jitsu, Jitte (one-handed weapon that allows you to block a sword and break its blade), Bo-jitsu (stick). The fundamentals are the same and the basic techniques are very similar. In the dojo, we mainly practice Ito, Nito and Kodachi. Each one of the members of the school lives in different regions of Japan. We travel hundreds of kilometres each week to practice together.

DRAGON: How do you move with a sword? Is there a particular technique or do you just walk normally?

M. IWAMI: We walk or move according to what Musashi believed to be the natural way of walking. Musashi walked on the balls of his feet – in most schools, in a dojo, you learn to walk on the arch of the foot. However, in nature, one walks using the ball of the feet, raising one's toes. We should always be aware and ready for a potential attack by our enemies.

DRAGON: In one of his duels, Musashi threw his short sword at his opponent. Is this a technique taught in his school?



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M. IWAMI: Musashi teachings say that in a duel, all tools can be used. When he fought this duel with the meijin (grand master) of the kusarigama (a sort of sickle on a chain with a heavy weight at the end), Musashi could not use his long sword because of the kusarigama's double threat (the blade on one end, the weight of iron on the other). He therefore threw his kodachi (short sword) at his opponent and followed up by striking with his long sword. Musashi won the fight following a perfectly natural and opportunistic reaction.

DRAGON: Is it true that Musashi used Jitte quite a bit?

M. IWAMI: Musashi's father, Munisaï, was a meijin (grand master) of Jitte. Naturally, Musashi learned the art of Jitte through his father. But, during his time, Hyoho – the Strategic Path – was a generalist martial art. As a result, Musashi also studied the sword, the stick, jitte and taijutsu (or ju-jitsu – hand-to-hand techniques).

DRAGON: So, Musashi also used Ju-jitsu techniques?

M. IWAMI : Techniques are important. But the foundation of Musashi's teachings are best expressed by the philosophy put forth in his most famous book, Gorin No Sho, the Treaty of the Five Elements. This is a book that can be read, re-read and re-read – each reading unveils new ideas and inspirations.

DRAGON: What strategy is taught in your school?

M. IWAMI: In our school, there is Kizen no Hyoho. We never attack first. One has to know and take advantage of the moment your opponent attacks. Having anticipated this action, we use it to strike. If the opponent waits, we must give the impression we are not ready, or are weak, in order to entice the opponent to attack. The instant the opponent is moved to strike, we prepare our response. This is called Kizen no Hyoho or Sensen non Sen, which is not only a strategy, but a way of life, a way of behaving and acting in certain situations, with or without a sword. When you've really understood what your master has taught you, then you attain the real heart (kokoro) of the human being.

DRAGON: What is your relationship to Buddhism?

M. IWAMI: A samurai must be prepared to die at any moment. Bushido, the Martial Way, is a preparation for death. But even women and children can prepare for death. For Musashi, the difference is that a samurai or a Bushi (man of the Martial Way) must always win, must always be ready, and in other words, must always live and survive. This teaching corresponds to Buddhism.

DRAGON: Why did you choose to study in this school?

M. IWAMI: After having read Gorin No Sho, I really wanted to study the techniques and the kokoro (heart). About 30 years ago, I contacted Musashi's descendant, but he did not practice his ancestor's art. However, he led me to the 10th successor of the Nito school, and I became his disciple.

<http://hyohonitenichiryu.wordpress.com/>



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DRAGON: Is the school open to anyone and what are the criteria for admission ?

M. IWAMI: Yes, it is open to anyone and we have never refused anyone. Musashi's teachings are for the entire world. Here in Europe, if you want to study these teachings, you need Philippe's authorization. Please contact Philippe.

DRAGON: What do you think of the workshop you conducted?

M. IWAMI: I really appreciated the efforts given by the organizers of the workshop, which was held in St. Brice sous Forêt, Val d'Oise, from October 14-17th, 2004. Thanks to Philippe and the members of his school, and Alain LORAND, Mayor of St Brice, I was given the opportunity to open Musashi's teachings to Europe. Since his entry into the world of Hyoho Niten Ichi Ryu, Philippe practices with sincerity and assiduity. He has been to Japan many times for very difficult keiko (training time). What I saw in him during these sessions gave me much confidence in him as a person. As a result, I authorized Philippe to organize this workshop. It was a great honour for me to have had the opportunity to meet the participants of this workshop who were so serious and sincere. I must thank Musashi as well for giving me these amazing opportunities to meet people. I hope that all the participants will continue to practice the Hyoho Niten Ichi Ryu keikos. I look forward to seeing them all again for the next workshop, which will take place from the 6-9th of October 2005, at Saint Brice sous Forêt, in France.

DRAGON: What advice would you give a participant?

M. IWAMI: Musashi wrote in his book, Gorin no Sho, that a 1000 days keiko is called Tan and a 10000 days keiko is called Ren. One thousand days represents 3 years and 10 thousand day 30 years. Whether it be 3 or 30 years, we must continue keiko without respite. This is the most important point: persevere with keiko – good luck!