



International Workshop of the Two Swords School, France 2011
Stage International de l'Ecole des Deux Sabres, France 2011

兵法二天一流

Hyoho Niten Ichi Ryu

“We have to use swords through our souls”

Interview of Iwami Toshio soke, 11th successor to Miyamoto Musashi,
October 17th, 2010 in Kokura, Kitakyushu, Kyushu, Japan
By Nguyen Thanh Thiên. Translation Kajiya Takanori and Jouanah Ghori

Nguyen Thanh Thien: Iwami soke, thank-you for answering these questions. Your answers will very much interest martial art people throughout the world. Your sword school is famous for its founder Miyamoto Musashi who is considered by many as the greatest swordsman in Japanese history and for his Book of Five Rings, *Gorin no sho*. How do you link these two martial art mile-stones?

Iwami Toshio soke: Musashi's thoughts in *Gorin no sho*, Book of Five Rings, are common thoughts not only for the Japanese, but also for people all over the world. So we could say Musashi and his ideas are still alive in our minds.

Nguyen Thanh Thien: What does learning with the *soke* mean? (For you in relation to Imai soke and for your students in relation to you).

Iwami Toshio soke: *Soke* means the only one who has succeeded in proper thoughts and skills. We have to learn these through *Soke* as through a mirror; we could also say *Soke* is like a needle and pupils are like threads, i.e. *Soke* leads us like needle and threads.

Nguyen Thanh Thien: Is *koryu* a lineage and if so, what flows through each generation?

Iwami Toshio soke: In our style, the most excellent pupil can succeed *Soke*. Also, he has to show and perform the soul and skill of Niten Ichi-ryu.

Nguyen Thanh Thien: Why do you use a *bokken* and not a metal sword, the *katana*?

Iwami Toshio soke: If we used real swords in our practices, we would be afraid of them and would not use them properly. That is why we use wooden swords in our practices.

Nguyen Thanh Thien: Beginners start with *Itto*, one sword, and go on to *Kodachi*, small sword, and then *Nito*, two swords. Please could you tell us about the importance of *Itto*? and *Nito*?

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



International Workshop of the Two Swords School, France 2011
Stage International de l'Ecole des Deux Sabres, France 2011

兵法二天一流

Hyoho Niten Ichi Ryu

Iwami Toshio soke: In our style, Musashi believed we had to train both our arms freely. And if we could not kill our opponents easily by holding the sword with only one hand, then we should use the sword with both hands like usual Kendo. It is a very rational thought.

Nguyen Thanh Thien: Today, people enjoy learning a martial art and gradually improve it here and there through their practice. What do you think of such an attitude in the spirit of *koryu* and specifically of Hyoho Niten Ichi Ryu?

Iwami Toshio soke: We think we have to use swords through our souls, so we cannot use swords properly until we have a proper soul. First of all, we therefore have to learn and train thoughts and souls. Those are the reasons why we have to practice over long lapses of time.

Nguyen Thanh Thien: Something that is difficult to understand for people today is why one needs lifelong practice to learn a *koryu*. Today, everyone tries to move fast. What can be construed in the notion of fast learning and its opposite, slow learning?

Iwami Toshio soke: Musashi used the word "*Tanren*".
"Tan" means training in one thousand days,
"Ren" means training in 10 thousand days.
One thousand days are about 3 years,
Ten thousand days are about 10 years.
Those words mean we have to practice through our whole lifetime.

Nguyen Thanh Thien: You have been coming to Europe to teach since 2004. How have the students evolved within your teaching?

Iwami Toshio soke: First, we have to learn courtesy. I was taught to respect the masters as my sword skill progressed.

Nguyen Thanh Thien: You have students from many martial arts coming to you. Some are high graded and some are beginners. How do you teach such a variety of people, knowing that they also come from many different countries?

Iwami Toshio soke: Masters are like needles, pupils are like threads. It means pupils have to follow the masters like threads. And masters teach skills and souls through each pupil's mind.



International Workshop of the Two Swords School, France 2011
Stage International de l'École des Deux Sabres, France 2011

兵法二天一流

Hyoho Niten Ichi Ryu

Nguyen Thanh Thien: You tell your students that they are studying Miyamoto Musashi (you even say one should aspire to meet Musashi). Most come for the efficient techniques. Is there a difference in the two aims?

Iwami Toshio soke: Skills only follow souls. We cannot win against opponents until we have the right souls. And we cannot win ourselves. First of all, we have to train our souls.

Nguyen Thanh Thien: Why do you think so many martial arts refer to Miyamoto Musashi? And why is he so important to the Japanese spirit today? And for your students?

Iwami Toshio soke: Musashi wanted to be a great sword master when he was young. By the age of 28 or 29, he had fought over 60 times. After he turned 30 years old, he was able to think about his past and said: "I looked back upon my life, when I became 30 years old, now I have to say I could not win against opponents through my skill". He would deny his life achievements. He thought that opponents were just weak or that he was just lucky. From then on, he started training his soul. After 40 or 50 years old, his soul training became deeper. Finally he reached the ultimate position.

Nguyen Thanh Thien: Iwami soke, we met in Paris at the Champs Elysees Theater in 1998 and later in 2000 in Hanover for the Universal Exhibition. You were among a party of *koryu* (there was Hyoho Niten Ichi ryu, Itto Ryu, Kurama Ryu, Suio Ryu) all represented by their *soke* and their assistants. You also meet *koryu* at other exhibitions in Japan: Katori Shinto Ryu, Daito Ryu, Hontai Yoshin Ryu, Yagyu Ryu, etc. This is a huge amount of activity. What is the importance of *koryu* to Japanese culture?

Iwami Toshio soke: Such Kenjutsu or *koryu* have shaped Japanese mindsets. We can find the foundations or bases of the Japanese way in such kobudo old martial arts. Now modern fighting sports such as Kendo come from Kenjutsu [sword art], which are also referred to as *koryu*, old school.

Nguyen Thanh Thien: Many people know Kenjutsu through samurai movies without knowing they were inspired by Kenjutsu characters and techniques. In Kurosawa Akira's *The Seven Samurai*, the character Kyuzo is said to have been based on Musashi. In the duel which introduces Kyuzo, the technique he uses is similar to *Tora Buri* although it has a *Katori* flavour due to Sugino Yoshio sensei, the Martial Art Choreography Director. Do you recognize the technical similarity and the hint to Musashi's fight with Sasaki Kojiro in which one can recognize *Tora Buri* with an additional leap?

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



International Workshop of the Two Swords School, France 2011
Stage International de l'Ecole des Deux Sabres, France 2011

兵法二天一流

Hyoho Niten Ichi Ryu

Iwami Toshio soke: I know skills resemble one another. But Musashi said we should not twist or jump in our fights. We have to let the opponents make a mistake or find their weak points and attack them. I think such scenes are specifically made for movies, for the actions to look spectacular.

October 17th, 2010