



Rough Diamonds



Polished Diamonds

Diamond-eight Cut is Forever (*)

Some thoughts about the diamond, at the heart of diamond-eight cut.

By Peter Furtado

Having been studying the Diamond-Eight Cut for a while now and finding much value and depth in the practice, I wanted to go deeper and know more about what its name means. What is the diamond, and where is it? What do we mean when we say we are polishing the diamond?

In Shintaido we use the word “cut” to refer to our arm and sword movements—*kiri komi* or (as in the case of the Diamond-Eight) *kiri harai*. In the Diamond-Eight Cut, are we using our arms (sword) to cut the diamond, or the diamond to sharpen the cut? What has polishing got to do with cutting?

Because diamonds are so hard, and are used to tip drills to enable them to cut through the most resistant of subjects, I assumed it was the latter—but now I think I was (mostly) wrong. We are, first and foremost, cutting the diamond itself.

Making a diamond beautiful

Maybe those of you who buy (or are given) rings and necklaces know all about techniques of diamond-cutting, but personally I don't go to jewellers very often and this knowledge is new to me, so I thought I would share it.

A newly mined diamond is dull to look at—it is only the skill of the cutter that gives it its beauty. There are many designs for cutting diamonds, but they are mathematically planned to use symmetry, proportions and polish (smoothness) to achieve beauty.

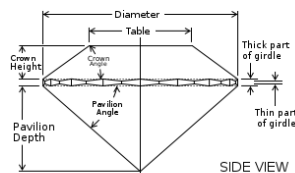


Figure 1: Diamond Proportions

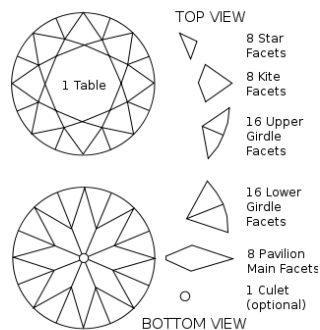


Figure 2: Facet Names

(*) By mistake, this article was only partially published in Taimyo magazine no. 60. The Editor apologises for the truncated article. This is the full and original version.

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The most popular style has eight facets around a central “table” at the top, and more facets below, where it is brought to a point. In all there are 58 facets on a single “round brilliant” diamond (the most common design), each one cut by a circular saw or laser.

A diamond is valued for its whiteness (you don’t usually want a coloured diamond, because colour indicates impurities); its “fire” (you *do* want flashes of spectral colours given off when light is refracted by the facets), its brilliance and scintillation (how much light is reflected back from its surface or interior, making it sparkle); and its clarity (which results from a perfectly smooth surface).

Polishing a diamond can mean the whole business of shaping it to achieve this complex beauty—or more specifically it can mean smoothing the surface to remove imperfections and increase the clarity.

Diamonds in keiko

We have not talked a lot about diamonds in Shintaido until now, except in Kongo-I, when we imagine a diamond that shines in all directions—up, down, forward and back. Yet diamonds have many characteristics that could be meaningful for us. Here’s just a few that I could think of—you will have your own to add to the list:

- Diamonds reflect and refract light—almost playing with light, like hikari
- Diamonds help us cut through illusions to the truth (the Buddhist Diamond Sutra emphasises this meaning)
- They are small but attract attention (hopefully like our organisation!)
- They are the hardest, most durable material in nature, forged under great pressures (like our hard-won knowledge in keiko)
- They are inorganic crystals, made of carbon that has— long ago—been part of the cycle of life (they are a bridge between the organic and inorganic worlds)
- A diamond is precious, and makes a rare and wonderful gift (like Shintaido!)
- A diamond is multifaceted (like Shintaido!).

Putting all this together, perhaps we can say that the diamond encapsulates the keiko world itself—perhaps even what Ito Sensei calls the Aoki world.

The Diamond-Eight Cut Diamond

When we do the Diamond-Eight Cut, it seems to me that we find a natural, unpolished diamond, perhaps in heaven (Tencho-i) or in our own hearts as we bring our hands down to our centre; then we unify with it—in Kongo-i, holding it simultaneously in our hearts, up to heaven and in the world of nature and other people.

Only then does the polishing begin, as we start to turn it from its natural state into something of great beauty: pure white, fiery, brilliant and clear. Each of our cuts creates a new facet, and by the end, we may have something that can achieve what Ito Sensei describes, in his rich notes on the Diamond Eight Cut, “Think of the Diamond as Tenshin (Universal Truth). Imagine the light emitted from the centre of the body spreading in all directions and filling the universe, finally returning to the hara (lower abdomen).”

To create such a wonderful diamond, we need to make each of our cuts very sharp, very precise, very smooth, and very clear. Like a laser beam. It also means paying attention continually to the diamond, as well as the cut. Someone cutting a mineral diamond will be focused entirely on the stone: but as we do Diamond-Eight Cut we are also focusing on far, far more. We have to focus on ourselves, on heaven, on the earth, and other people (kumite partners or imagined others) – the diamond itself is the fifth dimension, at the heart of all this! If we

can manage to bring all these five dimensions together in this manner, our diamond will be very special, very rich and powerful. It will surely be like mythic heroes forging a sword imbued with magical powers.

It also means the cuts do not—as I had been imagining—all pass through a single point (like the centre of the Union Jack). The diamond remains stationary at the absolute centre, as the cuts pass by its edges.

When we finish our final cut, what happens to the newly-polished diamond? Do we treasure it in our hearts? Save it for future use, to sharpen our swords and enable us to cut through to the truth? Return it to the Earth? Give it to a loved one? Liberate it into the world, for someone to find and to wonder over? Forget it? Show it off? That's up to us. But don't forget: it will never fade away—because (in keiko even more than in romance or marketing) a diamond is forever.

Peter Furtado 



Participants to the British Shintaido Kangeiko 2018 at Dousi Abbey,

A Windy Kangeiko

Douai Abbey, 6th & 7th January 2018

By Charles Burns

2018 dawned wet, grey and windy. Luckily for us, the kangeiko event the following weekend was not wet, but it was certainly windy!

We met in the blue-floored hall at Elstree School for a preliminary BS College keiko led by Ula. When we arrived it seemed as though a devilish wind had already been at work. The floor was covered with dried mud, scattered randomly across the hall, as if thrown by some devilish imp. After cleaning the floor, and enjoying one of Nagako's warm ups, we revised a variety of basic kenjutsu kata: kihon kata, Diamond Eight, and Shoden kata. These kata were to form the backbone of our work over the weekend.

These kata also form the backbone of the recently-introduced kenjutsu exam curriculum. As such they have been the subject of considerable technical revision, and so their form came as a surprise to me. The kenjutsu

kihon kata has been through so many revisions since it formed part of my graduate exam in 1994. At that time it was a simple series of cuts, jodan, chudan, gedan, which one could be asked to perform to a variety of different gorei. Today the whole arrangement is finely choreographed, even down to the dojo manners which surround it. The sequence of cuts is the same, but the whole arrangement has become a carefully nurtured kata in it's own right.

After this keiko we decamped to the White Cottages to meet old friends (and one or two new ones), chat over cups of tea, and discuss the program ahead. The cottages were freezing cold, and very draughty, reminding us of the old days before the cottages were smartened. It seemed as though the very walls were cold. Had a new-year wind been blowing here too? I flicked some switches on the heating control panel. The time dial was pointing at 1am; it seemed somebody had inverted night and day.

After lunch we all drove back to Elstree School. I don't think anybody braved the freezing wind and walked there. Appropriately, the afternoon keiko began with an exercise to calm the breath, reaching up and breathing out slowly as we lowered our hands in front of our abdomens. The hall became quiet and still at last. Our breath was lowered and our bodies warned (and some of us nearly fell asleep...)

Now motionless, we returned to the morning's kata. We practiced each movement of the kenjutsu kihon kata, in turn (dai-jodan, jodan, chudan, gedan and tsuki) with a partner stepping back to receive our cuts. Then we practiced the basic movement of Diamond Eight, before splitting into two groups to research it in more depth. We explored the Sei and Dai versions, with some asking later which of the two really feels bigger?

Diamond Eight Dai feels like an eiko practice. The hands following the sword give the practitioner the chance to sweep the space around them with their eyes. Since the kata is performed while standing in one spot, it is more like eiko sei than eiko dai. Some people reported getting dizzy, with the tip of the sword having an almost hypnotic effect. In Diamond Eight Sei, however, the eyes keep looking forwards. With our eyes fixed on the horizon this more formal kata naturally seems to expand, becoming as large as our mind can make it.

The advanced group went on to practice shoden kata, and later gave a demonstration of three kata in sequence: Diamond Eight Sho, Diamond Eight Dai and Shoden.

Shoden kata has been through so many changes. This kata is still a work in progress, and it is hard to know if the version we practiced will be it's final incarnation.



Diamond Eight Dai: Geoff, Peter and Terry.

This version has a slow opening, but seems to speed up as it goes forward, like a soft warm wind which shifts impatiently, before finally revealing the squall it portends. The first five cuts, chudan and jodan, are performed at a snails pace, the bokuto hardly disturbing the air around it. This is followed by three playful jodan cuts, with a kiai to scatter the birds from the trees: Eh, Ya, Toh! Then, the five slow cuts are repeated, the kata once again feeling like a soft breeze. It gathers power through three technically-challenging gedan cuts, after which the final four cuts - chudan and jodan - race toward a final ringing kiai: TOH! Like the sound of a bell, the kata melts back into silence, a simple shoko pointing at the wind—waiting for the world to become still. Finally, quietly, the sword is put away.

The theme of this event was “Ibuki”. This mysterious word and its kanji were emblazoned across the publicity. After supper at the now-warm White Cottages we gathered in the common room to learn more about it. Laurent summarised his article “From Rai to Ibuki” (see page 7). Since it is reproduced here I will not summarise it again, save to say that he talked about the music of man, the music of earth, and the music of heaven, all of which are based on breath. His description of the music of the earth particularly caught my imagination, an image of wind making sound through the trees, cracks and crevices of the earth. Even when silent, the wind is still there, waiting.

This was followed by wide-ranging discussion of all things wind related, from macro weather systems to farts. Many interested points were made, and many questions asked. We began with the image of humans listening to the sounds of nature and wondering how to imitate it. How can we do that? Is wind akin to ether? Is it an element? Do we even like the wind? Does it exist at all? Do we still make sound in silence?

Masashi talked about vibration as being the sound in silence. He showed us the kanji he had made for the event and played us the sound of Japanese bamboo pipes. We talked about John Cage’s recordings of silence, and the sound of a city street as being a kind of music. Do musicians create or simply record their music? Where does their inspiration come from? The word “inspiration” itself is a description of breath. Does the earth inspire? Artists seem to feel their inspiration as external; they receive their ideas in the same way that trees bend with the wind.

The questions kept coming. Why are some people unable to bend with the wind? Asthma can be thought of as an inability to let go, an inability to breath out. The wind itself seems very random. Where does it start? Why does it change direction so? On a macro level – looking at photographs of the planet – it has a profound order, a pattern that repeats right around the globe. Wind can be strong. It can be dangerous. It messes with our hair. We all pass wind!

Finally, we talked about the way Shintaido brings us into contact with the wind, with the music of the earth. Some Shintaido forms are based on the wind, eg; kaze no kata, Matsukaze. Our practice brings us into contact with nature. Elemental things seem to happen around us during keiko. We have all experienced the joy of the wind moving clouds above our heads, the sun shining though unexpectedly, or the sound of a dawn chorus during shoko practice at past kangeikos.

The evening finished with a short meditation on wind, to the sound of bamboo pipes.

The following morning, just before dawn, we gathered on the lawn outside the White Cottages to practice Taimyo. There was frost on the grass and a biting wind. We performed part 1 in darkness, facing a tree silhouetted against a thin, grey dawn. During part 2, the grey dawn broke, the grass became green, and the wind blew right through us. During 10-point meditation it began to snow, settling briefly on our out-stretched arms. At the end of part 3 the wind blew the clouds away and a patch of pale-blue sky appeared above us. Still the wind blew.

We breakfasted on porridge, toast and scrambled eggs – to fortify ourselves against the elements – before making our way to the outdoor dojo for the main practice of the day. We told ourselves stories of kangeikos long past when only white keiko-gi were allowed!

Although the air temperature was just above freezing, the wind-chill effect made it several degrees below. The slow thawing of the frost did nothing to deter the wind. Away from the Cottages, it sped happily over the cricket field towards us, searching for openings in our clothes. After a much-needed warm up the keiko began with a slow performance of tenshingoso, immediately followed by the Diamond Eight kata, performed freehand. Next we split into a number of groups to explore Diamond Eight at a deeper level. We practiced walking eight steps to each cut, then turning for the next. Soon we were practicing in pairs: Dai-jodan versus Diamond Eight. The practice began to run away with some of us, we needed to move! Diamond Eight became Eiko Dai.


We gathered together so that each group could demonstrate what they had discovered. The rest of us huddled together to watch, like a group of Antarctic penguins, chattering and shivering in the wind.

After a short break we practiced a combination of tsuki and dai-jodan cuts, stepping forward on the right foot. Then, we practiced in pairs to learn how to receive this movement, stepping back and watching the energy. Holding our bokutos naturally to the right we step back for tsuki, pause, and back again to receive dai-jodan kiri-oroshi. As this final cut lands our own bokuto is raised up high, like a ball bouncing from the ground. We make our own dai-jodan cut to our partner's head. This arrangement is part of the new Jissen-kumitachi program, central to the new kenjutsu exams.

As the morning wore on, the temperature did gradually begin to rise. Imperceptibly, the wind died down and the sun began to warm us. At some point, late in the keiko, we each discovered we were no longer cold.

The final practice of the day was Dotoh, "crashing waves", also part of Jissen kumitachi. As our partner attacks with dai-jodan we meet them head-on, making a cut to our partner's wrist. Breathing in, to expand, we push forwards, pushing them off balance behind. The timing is crucial: too early and we impale ourselves on our partner's bokuto; too late and we meet their sword coming down rather than their wrist going up.

We were in no hurry to return to the Cottages. The wind had died down and the practice had finally warmed us up. A late, but very welcome lunch of baked potatoes completed the process. This was followed by our closing meeting, and the British Shintaido AGM. We all departed, blown on the wind to another year.

Charles Burns 

From Rai to Ibuki (籟 到 息吹) ***Development of a theme for the 2018 Kangeiko*** **Laurent Lacroix**

The beauty of Chinese characters (I know very little about it) is that through the different strokes something is built, which is not a word but a symbol. There is a sort of artistic, aesthetic and symbolic understanding which is required. This is often very hard to communicate with words. I will not attempt to provide answers just raise a few questions.

My starting point was a French book written by Claude Larre and Elisabeth Rochat de la Vallee in which a passage from ZhuangZi chapter 2 is commented on (1996). Zhuang Zi (480) is one of the greatest Daoist philosophers, Zhuang Zi means Master Zhuang (莊周). His writings are collected in a book also called ZhuangZi (written 莊子.) At the beginning of chapter 2, the disciple asked his master to explain to him the music of Earth, the Music of Man and the Music of Heaven. The character used for "music" is 籟 (lai in Chinese, rai in Japanese.)

The normal translation of this character (e.g. Thomas Cleary, Burton Watson and others) is pipes, piping or even bamboo. The use of the word music was new and very interesting, especially as I read this after the Hibiki Daienshu.

籥 is not actually music but a very archaic musical instrument—musical pipe with 3 reeds, or a straight flute with 3 or 6 holes. It also means resonance (rai in Japanese is used to express the rattling of the wind.)

Rochat's translation when the master starts with the music of Earth is as follows:

"The great mass of Clay has a kind of belching which is like a breath, and the name of this breath is wind. This wind is usually motionless, but when the wind is put in motion ten thousand orifices and openings suddenly clamour and cry and make a noise in a kind of great sound of Music"

and then she comments :

"This wind is the breath of life which is able to carry all seeds of life like pollen and able to give impetus to all kinds of life... But the wind can be motionless i.e if the leaves do not move, it does not mean that the wind does not exist, just that the wind returned to the motionless state or nothingness. But the wind is also all kinds of movement and agitation in our body and our mind. There is always motion and motionlessness."

The master continues his explanation with the example of a tree (man?)

This tree is just like a man with roots deep in the earth and branches in the wind. When the wind blows it enters all the small cavities on the trunk and branches and during a tempest one can hear the sound of the resonances inside the wood of the tree, but soon the tree will become silent again. This is what is called earthly music, which is just music coming through openings and cavities, these are the doors between the inner vitality and the world outside.

Burton Watson translated the student's reaction to his master's answer:

By the Piping of Earth, then, you mean simply the sound of these hollows, and by the piping of man the sound of flutes and whistles (sometimes translated as row of tubes.)

So 籥 (lai) the musical reed is only a symbol and image. Would it just be the void inside the reed which is resounding? To call it pipe, piping, music is not correct. Each of us is like a stalk which is empty, and there is perhaps vibration in it. Each of us is like a resonating pipe—the sounding of this pipe could just be emotions. Emotions are always reactions to the worlds outside by one's own vitality.

It is natural that there are tempests, showers, great winds and after no wind at all. The only important thing for the tree is to be able to bend with the wind, to follow the violence of the wind, but after to come back to a motionless state.

Another point is that the tree just receives the wind. It never says "today I do not want the wind." Human music is something natural like Earth music. If you do not want a particular situation or you want something too much, it is the beginning of the cacophony. But if we just react to what is as we truly are? In a forest, in a tempest or in calm weather, there is always the impression that the trees are all playing together. But human beings don't do this. Everyone is of course playing its own music, that is natural. But why then do we have this feeling that mankind is "making music in a great cacophony"?

Graham in his translation had the following note (1981):

Zhuang Zi's parable of the wind compares the conflicting utterances to the different notes blown by the same breath in the long and short tubes of the pan-pipes, and the noise made by the wind in hollows of different shapes. It is natural for differently constituted persons to sing differently. Do not try to decide between their opinions and behaviours, listen to heaven who breathes through them.

That is what I was struggling with when I gave this character to Masashi as a possible theme with a very succinct reference of where it came from. Masashi came back to us with Ibuki as a theme. Ibuki 息吹 in Japanese means "Breath, signs of something new and fresh, breath (metaphor)". The first character means "breath, respiration, sound" and the second character "blow, breathe, puff" but also "playing a wind instrument, or music of the wind instrument."

息 more precisely is expiration by the nose of the wind/breath/ (qi) coming from the heart, the wind/breath/ (qi) of life. It could also be translated from Chinese as "to rest, to be of a tranquil mind or to desist from." but also "to cheer up someone." This character is made up of two characters 自 Zi and 心 Xi, the first one meaning "self, private, personal" and the second "heart, mind, soul."

To convey these ideas within this combination of the two characters in Ibuki, we translated it as "enjoying the breath of life". Was it accurate or even useful?

Here a complete translation by Thomas Merton in *The way of Chuang Zu* (1965)

THE BREATH OF NATURE

When great Nature sighs, we hear the winds
Which, noiseless in themselves,
Awaken voices from other beings,
Blowing on them.
From every opening
Loud voices sound.
Have you not heard
This rush of tones?

There stands the overhanging wood
On the steep mountain:
Old trees with holes and cracks
Like snouts, maws, and ears,
Like beam-sockets, like goblets,
Grooves in the wood, hollows full of water:
You hear mooing and roaring, whistling,
Shouts of command, grumbings,
Deep drones, sad flutes.
One call awakens another in dialogue.
Gentle winds sing timidly,
Strong ones blast on without restraint.
Then the wind dies down. The openings empty out their last sound.
Have you not observed how all then trembles and subsides?

Yu replied: I understand:
The music of earth sings through a thousand holes.
The music of man is made on flutes and instruments.
What makes the music of heaven?

Master Ki said:
Something is blowing on a thousand different holes.
Some power stands behind all this and makes the sound die down.
What is this power?



A personal account of Kangeiko 2018: Ibuki

Susan Lacroix

Having become interested and excited about this theme, which I finally felt I had some little sense of after a few experiences of vibrations of different types in silence, even if i could not claim to fully understand Laurent's beautiful explanation of his thinking about it, the appointed day arrived for departure to Reading.

My first impression was of the warmth of my companions in the changing room and this warmth continued throughout the weekend. For me this supports the whole perspective of shintaido as a social practice and perhaps of a model, one which could be transformative in one's life and relationships.

This was followed by the next remarkable happening for me, namely that despite general lack of energy and having contracted the fairly ubiquitous virus going around, somehow in all the keikos i could at least manage to keep going, or better. By this stage in shintaido and indeed life, I should perhaps have learned to trust in keiko and the processes which occur during it. ... of course this brings questions about energy: how do I waste it? how is it that i can find it in certain circumstances and so forth? But there is also some possible relevance to Ibuki, in that when anxious, one is contracted, all sorts of unnecessary emotions and thoughts are swirling and the breath and its energy do not flow well through all this. So the winds do not sound through me and I do not resonate in the way that as a human I could.

When we began the kangeiko, we were each asked to share any thoughts we might have on the theme and the coming practice. For me it was very much about letting go of the unnecessary, a sort of cleansing or purifying..

The practice of simply experiencing breathing and rising and falling of breath and energy was very powerful and also pointed again to what Ito sensei had shown previously on time: Tenshingoso done in a very small compass with one long breath. We had been told then that long one is long life!

We also did one hand Tenshingoso moving in various directions.

We then practised the beautiful katas Diamond Eight sei and dai, and Shoden no kata. We learnt that the first movement after entering in (Sei chuken) in DEC dai is hasso and this enables one to turn and begin the widening vision. It is by no means easy to understand where one is looking in dai: is it the tip of the bokken? but if so, what about the whole world around? If it is the world, where is the focus on the moment? It must be both...so the 'answer' is surely to practise and explore!

In shoden no kata, we learnt that the final 'Toh' signifies to enter deeply into, and therefore is more fitting than 'ai.' I had not realised that these three different words meant more than just 'first , second , third...' blows or thrusts.

In kumite we practised komi movements which I found particularly helpful as keeping connection during them has always been challenging. There was as much emphasis on how to receive as how to cut throughout the weekend. For me truly keeping connection and truly giving and receiving cuts is clearly a very deep study.

Excited and enlivened by the practice of both morning and afternoon we then returned to prepare supper, most of which Laurent had already done very competently. It was much enjoyed, as was the wine and the galette des rois.

After supper we began to discuss the theme of Ibuki., with everyone contributing and widening the perspective. Masashi played us some sho music, an instrument which was originally used for the emperor but has now been popularised a little. It was haunting and seemed to touch deeply into areas of the body. Unfortunately I needed to try a lying down form of meditation by this stage so missed the more formal one offered.

The next morning, it was very cold for Taimyo, despite many layers. I cannot pretend that my heart did not slightly sink when told we would be practising keiko outside..... But Minagawa sensei described it as a challenge, so as there was not the annual shoko challenge this year, I decided to try to make use of this one instead. The interest of what we were doing soon took over and it was a wonderful practice, enhanced by the feeling of space and winds as well as the church bells.

The thing which stood out most for me was kumite with Laurent when he told me that there was a specific way of breathing together in ichi no taichi which allowed all the difficulties around timing to be resolved . This was a way of creating a common breathing , kokyū, which transformed our practice together. But Minagawa sensei also said that it is not helpful to insist on breathing sometimes as then people can get stuck.

Dotoh, crashing together, then followed. Here was another chance to see how the breathing can itself cause action and affect, just as sound can do the same, rather than be tacked on as I have done till now. But the timing of both this and ichi no tachi is very precise and subtle, and it was only too easy to miss the moment or the breathing or both....

I left with the impression that from small glimpses here and there, we had been given new material from which real change in my practice might come with time and dedication. I felt gratitude not just to the senseis but to all those who had been there and shared this fine weekend. In particular I want to acknowledge the tremendous work done by the organisers and their attention to detail which created such a smooth event.

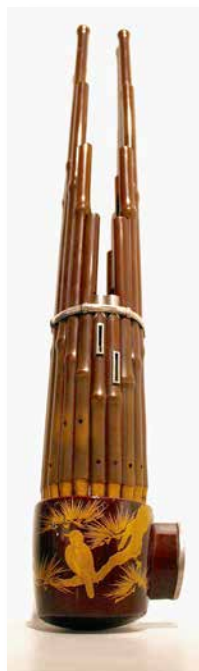
Susan Lacroix



Getting warm and sheltered from the wind

The Shō and the Ney: Japanese and Western ways to illustrate Rai & Ibuki?

Laurent Lacroix



The shō

During our last Kangeiko, while discussing its theme "Ibuki" Minagawa sensei mentioned a musical instrument I never heard of before, the shō. The shō is a Japanese mouth organ. It can be played both on exhalation and inhalation so allowing long periods of uninterrupted play. Minagawa sensei thought that the sounds that this instrument makes could represent the "music of Heaven" or the light shining from there. Could it also be a symbol for the "music of Man"?

The shō is one of the three primary woodwind instruments used in gagaku, Japan's imperial court music. Its traditional playing technique in gagaku involves the use of tone clusters called *aitake* (合竹).

The shō consists of 17 slender bamboo pipes, each of which is fitted in its base with a metal free reed. Each pipe has a single hole and a pipe only produces a sound when the hole is covered by one of the musician's fingers. Two of the pipes are silent, although research suggests that they were used in some music during the Heian period. A possible explanation of the continued presence of these two silent pipes is both aesthetic and symbolic. With these two extra pipes, the shō has two symmetrical wings so it looks like a resting Phoenix (Hōō in Japanese). It is also said that the sound of the shō imitates the call of the Phoenix.

The pipes are tuned carefully with a drop of wax. As moisture collects in the shō's pipes it prevents them from sounding, performers can be seen warming the instrument over a small charcoal brazier when they are not playing. This might also be part of the symbolism attached to this instrument.

As the shō looks like a resting phoenix, it means, according to Japanese traditions, that he or she has arisen from flames as a winner, beating all life's challenges and defeating hard times. The Phoenix is a symbol of rebirth from the ashes of the past, and it also represents the victory of life over death, thus immortality.

In Chinese mythology, the Phoenix, named Feng-huang, or often just feng is an immortal bird whose rare appearance is said to be an omen foretelling harmony. The feng-huang is often considered to signify yin-yang harmony; its name is a combination of the words feng representing the male aspect (but also meaning wind) and huang the female. It is mentioned as early as the Shang dynasty in oracle-bone inscriptions. Tradition recounts an appearance of the feng-huang before the death of the legendary Yellow Emperor, who ruled China in the 27th century BCE. In the first chapter of the *"The Classic of Mountains and Rivers"* the feng-huang appears to be wearing the characters for each of the 5 constant Confucian values: benevolence, justice, correctness, knowledge, and integrity. These five constant virtues are also represented by the 5 colours of its feathers corresponding to the five elements (black, white, red, yellow and blue). Furthermore its body also symbolises the "six celestial bodies": the head is the Sky/Heaven, the eyes are the Sun, its back the Moon, its wings are the Wind, its feet Earth and its tail the planets. Would then the phoenix be a symbol of the harmonious man, who has developed his own Rai or internal music, able to respond appropriately to external influences?



Playing the shō.



A Phoenix painted by Hokusai

The Phoenix is commonly drawn in Chinese illustrations of the human body and its various life forces or breaths. The Phoenix can often be seen flying from the heart. The qi flowing out of your heart is like a red swirling wind, full of power, protecting you with your spirit (Shen) in the form of a fiery Phoenix. This Phoenix represents your innate spirit, alive, graceful and powerful. But in some Daoist alchemy the Phoenix embodies the Spleen energy.

So the Phoenix and the shō might represent what we are and what we could aspire to be. Our aim would be to resonate like a shō, to be reborn an accomplished being in a Confucian sense. This is open to all of us, we just must be able to see.

It is also said that the song of the feng-huang is exceptionally beautiful and meaningful and that the animal has a special appreciation of "human music." If seen, it is a sign of world peace. Its latest appearance is said to have taken place in 1368.

When a phoenix is in flight the fluttering of the wings sound like a bamboo flute, and its main food is bamboo grains. This naturally leads us to the reed-flute.

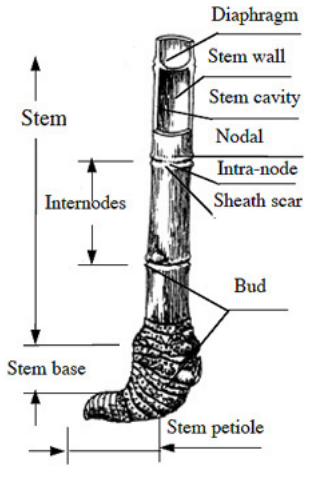
From Afghanistan to Turkey and all around the Mediterranean sea, the bamboo flute has been played for thousands of years. In some Pharaonic tombs there are depictions of reed flutes being played in exactly the same way as they are today. These are very simple instruments. The one I will talk about here is the ney, which is still played in Turkey (ney means reed in Persian.) There it acquired deep meaning from the teaching of the 13th century Persian poet Rumi. But his teachings are likely to originate from older traditions. In the prologue of the first book of his "*Mesnevi*", Rumi wrote a long poem dedicated to the reed-flute (only the first 12 distichs of the 18 are quoted here):

Listen to the ney, how it complains,
Lamenting its banishment from its home:
"Ever since they tore me from my osier bed,
My plaintive notes make men and women weep.
I need a heart torn by separation
to pour into it the pain of desire.
Whatever remains far from his source
Aspires to the moment when he will united with it again.
I enjoyed all gatherings,
I joined in with those who rejoice as well as with those who cry.
Each interprets my notes in harmony with his own feelings,
But none sought to know the secrets of my heart.
My secret is not far from my sorrow
But neither ear nor eye know how to perceive it.
The body is not hidden to the soul, nor the soul to the body,
Yet no man has ever seen a soul."
This sound of the ney is fire, not wind,
Let him who lacks this fire be accounted dead!
It is the fire of love which is in the flute, (1)
It is the heat of Love which make the wine bubble.

(1) Love signifies the strong attraction that draws us to the "original Breath" or in the case of Rumi, the Creator.

The flute is the confidant of all unhappy lovers;
His accents tear the veil.
Who ever saw a poison and an antidote like the ney?
Who ever saw a comforter and a lover like the ney.

Rumi, translation taken from several sources



Anatomy of a Bamboo stem



The ney

Of course this famous poem could be taken at face value and one could rush to listen to the ney and hope to gain some insights. Rumi intended it to be a kind of symbolic analogy, so students could glimpse into the unknown.

For Rumi, the ney represents the mature being (who has gained some wisdom, an accomplished man who has attuned to his own resonance.) Every man and woman is born with this potential, but one has to undertake a journey to realise it or nothing will be gained. Of course it is an odessey without end.

Now when we look at a bamboo stick, each section (internode) is separated by a diaphragm, so one cannot breathe through it: it cannot make a sound. So the first stage is to clean the inside of the bamboo stick so breath can flow through it. To create a reed-flute, the craftsman burns the successive diaphragms with a red-hot metal stick. When this is done, the bamboo becomes available to the breath of the Musician. Then the 7 holes will be made, so melodies can finally be created.

In this metaphor, man is originally just a bamboo stick; there is, in his nature, some diaphragms which must be torn apart so he can be available to a higher aspiration, to the surrounding breath. For Rumi, the breath was the Creator, but the image is universal. So the ney reminds us of our separation from our true nature and our lack of harmony as well as the value of the journey we hopefully have started.

This also reminds me of a very famous anecdote from Rumi's life:

One day a theologian asked Rumi: "You are a good man, how is it that you invented this heresy of listening to music? What does it mean to you?"

Rumi answered: "When I listen to music, I hear the creaking of the opening of the gates of Heaven".

The theologian retorted: "and yet, when I listen to music I hear no such a thing"

Rumi then smiled and said: "Of course you hear it, but what you perceive is the creaking of the gates as they close"

This 18 distichs poem is actually the only one Rumi wrote himself, with his own hand. The remaining 24,000 verses of the "*Mesnev*" were written by his disciple, Celebi, whom Rumi asked to make note of his commentaries, which were improvised as he went along.


During the first Mugen workshop last September (2017), I had an unusual experience, maybe because the group was especially enthusiastic and focussed. Minagawa sensei taught the group Tenshingoso, in the most extraordinary way. He asked everyone to sit down and taught us the five sounds which we "sang" together. While doing so, Minagawa sensei, while standing, showed us the movements of Tenshingoso following our sound. In that way Tenshingoso was rapidly learnt while people were resting or even meditating.

Then it was our turn to practice. During Um, I had the clear sensation of a strong energy flow going through me from Heaven down to Earth. My body felt quite hollow, like a tube. The feeling was so strong that I could not start the Ah movement. I was in a way stuck there, not knowing what to do and of course I was rather enjoying the feeling and either did not want to disturb this flow or even did not know how to handle it, what to do with it. So I stayed there while the group practiced Tenshingoso.

I was rather puzzled by the experience and asked Minagawa sensei, later that day, what should I have done? He simply answered:

"Yes, Um can be very enjoyable, but one has to start."

Maybe I am lacking the holes so I could not play any melodies. Would the holes come through practice?

Laurent Lacroix 

March 11th 2018-03-07

Pamela Minagawa

Today, the second 'Mugen' workshop is being held in London, organised by Susan and Laurent and being taught by Masashi. Today is also the 7th anniversary of the earthquake and tsunami which hit Japan. Masashi will be leading Taimyo in memory of the disaster.

Seven years ago I wrote an article for the Taimyo magazine. Of course, at that time every body was aware of the disaster and many people around the world helped either by giving donations or by travelling there to help.

Now, seven years on, the world has seen countless other natural disasters, hurricanes, typhoons, forest fires etc. It is impossible to remain concerned and connected with each of these events, as we all have to carry on with our lives. With the anniversary of the Tsunami approaching, Japanese TV has been showing programmes on different aspects of the recovery and it is both saddening and also uplifting to see. So many people, both children and adults, are still living with the trauma, unable to verbalise their fears, unable to come to terms with the loss. Large areas of land, which were devastated by the water, are only just beginning to be rebuilt. Ground is being levelled off, roadways constructed and plots of land are being prepared for houses. All this time tens of thousands of people have been living in prefab temporary accommodation. One lady said with a bright smiling face "I thought I would only be here about 2 years, but already 7 have passed". New communities have become established, old ties have sometimes been lost, but life carries on.

I am always impressed by the positive attitude the Japanese people have. They are used to dealing with calamities and natural disasters. I think it is part of their national character. They don't sit and wait for somebody to help them, they get up and help each other. Instead of having a negative attitude and saying 'Oh look what has happened to us, what will you do to help us?' they say "What can we do to help ourselves and others?"

Yuzuru Hanyu, a phenomenal and very popular ice skater, recently took part in the Winter Olympics. During a warm up session 4 months before the games, he fell and badly injured the ligaments in his right ankle. The country held its breath. He was on crutches and for 3 months could not bear weight. During the third month of recovery he was told to do visualization and practise that way. After one month of this he was finally allowed to bear weight and start skating. Although he was not able to participate in team events, he went on to win Gold in the individual category. His performance was stunning.

Yuzuru Hanyu is from Sendai, a city which was devastated by the earthquake and tsunami. He was about 14 years old at the time and was skating when the roof and ice rink started to collapse around him.

Immediately after the earthquake he looked at the devastation and asked himself if he really should continue skating, when so many people were suffering so much. However he decided to continue and hoped his efforts and achievements could encourage people. He uses his talents to lift people's spirits in the only way he can. If you watch his performances at the Olympic Games, and look at his face, especially at the end of his performance, it is incredibly moving. You can see he has done all this for Japan and for Sendai. He is skating for the people of the disaster.

There is a saying which is often used in Japan "Mae muki no kimochi" "With the feeling (or intention) of looking forward." I am sure Yuzuru Hanyu has inspired countless people. It is a very fundamental concept to Shintaido – running in Eiko, running forward and leaving the past behind.

Pam Minagawa



The Bath Bo club with three generations of Minagawa.

Mugen Workshop March 11th with Minagawa sensei

Susan Lacroix

The second Mugen workshop on March 11th was held in the same splendid and idiosyncratic venue, Union Chapel, Islington as the first. The acoustics are not so wonderful though, and for some, listening and hearing could be strained. We are hoping to possibly find a venue in West London for the continuing quarterly workshops after June.

The atmosphere was rather different this time, not only because some people were newcomers but perhaps also because of the long winter in which many people had suffered various seasonal illnesses leaving energy rather low; the unexpected transport and parking difficulties on the day; and the late opening of the premises. I myself had sprained my ankle the previous day, thus confirming that for me when something valuable is coming, I can expect obstacles inner and outer, which seem to be part of that very experience.

However, eventually people assembled and we could begin with a short warm up on the chair. It was the anniversary of the Tsunami, so we continued with Diamond Eight.

After this we studied the whole of Taimyo!! We practised the half moon step on the chair first which was a good way of introducing it. The degree of focus was quite intense, and not surprisingly people were quite tired after this.

We then moved to massaging each other on the chair which allowed Minagawa sensei to gauge how comfortable people were with each other and with touch. Wakame followed and then renki. I did this on the chair with someone, which was new and more demanding as one had to find a different experience of the koshi.

We ended with someone receiving tsuki from a line of people and using Tenshingoso applications to send the person away. All this helped people to leave feeling more energised as these afternoon practices were very accessible and enjoyable.

Many things arose for me from this workshop. One thing was the care Minagawa sensei took to make people feel at ease with each other not just with touch of another but also through the many pauses, during which people could connect to others. As most people were non practitioners and did not know each other, this was very helpful.

There was also the question of how much does one introduce to a group such as this one, with very different abilities and experience. There has to be enough for people to work on between workshops and to challenge those able to take that on, while there is help in the form of the booklet and the DVD showing Taimyo and describing techniques. On the other hand it takes time, and for some people much time, to learn even a few things which are so unfamiliar, and if people are overloaded they may feel discouraged.

Last time we had demonstrations which allowed people to rest while doing mitori geiko, and to practise from the chair which meant that they did Tenshingoso many times. I found it very interesting to observe how Minagawa sensei introduced the material and how he paced it. in both workshops.

There is also an educative aspect to this because for me there can be a very necessary emptying in keiko, which makes me feel exhausted but which is a precursor to receiving fresh and new energy. Certainly after the workshop both my son and I noticed how we were able to deal with difficulties in a far more relaxed way than usual for some days afterwards.

I still feel that continuing after Taimyo with other practices was important in helping to bring about a different state, although it made for a long day. but that is open to question, but it felt very satisfying and rich.

Finally there is the way one presents something so foreign in culture to ordinary people who are unfamiliar with martial arts. Minagawa sensei demonstrated an excellent model of this in the workshop.

Susan Lacroix

By Oscar Sharpe

Since coming to Guatemala, we are sharing the art of shintaido to children of all ages. They've have never explored anything like this, so you can imagine the look on their face when we arrived in class all in white!

Despite the children thinking they were getting ready for battle, we soon explained how Shintaido is an art of giving and receiving energy from both within and the partners they work with.

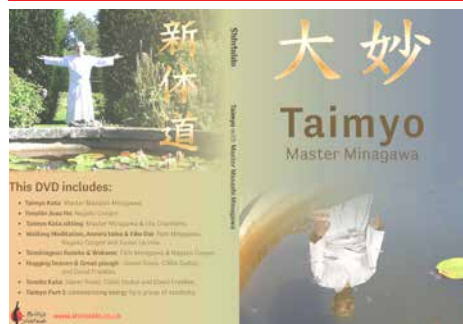
Working with different body movements and allowing the children to experience this, they all took part with huge enthusiasm - laughing, jumping and screaming at times!

We have another week here in Guatemala before we make our way to Nicaragua, there we will be working with another school hoping to offer and share all that we can.

Oscar Sharpe



Stephanie and Oscar teaching Shintaido in Guatemala



**New Taimyo DVD
with Master Minagawa.**

Still available for only £15.

Examination Report

Examination took place both on 27th February at Bath University

Examiner: Masashi Minagawa

Bojutsu

Sally Mitchell	9 Kyu
Sally Sharpe	7 kyu

Paul Buck	Shodan
Alex Hooper	Shodan
Susan Lacroix	Shodan
Laurent Lacroix	Shodan



*Examinees from left to right, Sally Mitchell, Sally Sharpe, Paul Buck, Susan Lacroix, Alex Hooper and Laurent Lacroix.
Front row: Minagawa Sensei and Goreisha Pam Minagawa.*

Programme, Contacts & Classes 2018 Programme.

Please Visit the events pages on www.shintaido.co.uk for further details

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Regular Classes

Classes led by current BS instructors or assistants. Shintaido classes and their venues may change, so please check before attending an unfamiliar class.

Tuesday	Bath, University of Bath.	8.00–9.30pm	Bath Bojutsu Club
Wednesday	Bristol, Silva Care.	10.30–11.30am	Shintaido for people with Learning Difficulties
Thursday	Stroud, Old Town Hall	10.30–11.30am	Gentle Shintaido
	Brighton, The Manor gym.	8.15–9.30pm	Shintaido
Friday	Eastington Community Centre, Glos	1.45–3.45pm	'Lightwaves' Class
	Reading, Clayfield Copse playing fields	7.30–8.30am	Shintaido/Bo tutorial
Weekends	Specialist classes with any BS Instructor. Available by appointment.		

Ibuki

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DISCOUNTS:

1. An additional £30.00 discount is available to BS members, and to members of equivalent international organisations.
2. Introductory offers and bursaries are available for first-time attendees. Please enquire.