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**"THE JAPANESE SWORD:  
ITS INFLUENCE ON JAPANESE CULTURE."**

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**NOTE: USE OF QUOTES/REFERENCES:** When quoting and/or using references from an author's work for the first time, by way of introduction, the author and title of the work is given. For all subsequent quotes and/or references from that work the relevant information is contained within the brackets following.

**NOTE: USE OF THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE:** All Japanese words, names, terms and phrases appear written in their accepted Roman alphabetic forms, however this is not a true indication of their correct pronunciation. While some Japanese words have entered the English language, e.g. *Samurai*, many such as *Katana* or *Tsuba* will appear strange and new. Their meanings are given in the thesis text on their first occurrence, however I appreciate that meanings may not be recalled as these words and phrases are used throughout the thesis. For these reasons all use of Japanese appears typed in *italics*, and a glossary is provided for easy reference to the meanings of repeated words their and pronunciation.

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## INTRODUCTION.

Within the limits of this thesis it is my intention to explore the effects and influences exerted by the Japanese sword over the artistic and cultural forms of the Japanese people. When I use the term "the Japanese sword", I am referring to the *Katana*, as it is known in the Japanese language; or "the Sword of the *Samurai*", as it has become more commonly known in the Western world.

In discussing this topic I will examine the sword's possible influences upon the Japanese arts in terms of subject matter and the weapon's probable role in the formation of certain rituals and cultural traditions within Japan. In doing so I will examine the significance of the sword within Japanese society and suggest reasons for its possible effects on the aspects of Japanese culture discussed in this thesis.

The reasons for my choice of this subject are as follows -

For many years I have had an interest in both the arts and cultures of Far East. This interest arose primarily because of my associated interest in the martial arts of both China and Japan, in particular my studies of the sword fighting arts.

Upon entering college as a graphic design student my attention became focused upon the art and society of Japan, especially in Japanese prints with their strong graphic nature. As a result of my own personal knowledge and experience of the Japanese martial arts it became apparent that there was and is a significant martial influence running through the prints and other art forms of the Japanese. It seemed that the most significant of these influences was that of the *Katana* or the "Sword of the *Samurai*".

In researching this theory it was obvious from the outset that a large amount of facts had been compiled on both the culture and art of Japan.



A great deal of historical information had been gathered on the *Samurai*, the warrior nobles of medieval Japan and to a lesser extent the history of the *Samurai's* sword; the *Katana*, had also been the subject of published articles. However, this published research discussed the blade almost entirely in terms of its physical form as it developed as a weapon of war. It was not possible to find material concerning any influences the sword may have exerted over other aspects of Japanese life.

It is, however, widely recognised by historians that the sword was considered an artifact of the highest importance by the individual *Samurai*. It is also accepted that the values of the society of the *Samurai* had and still does have an affect on the values of the Japanese people. The *Samurai* are admired and looked upon as role models; they are considered by the Japanese to embody all that is best in the Japanese people. The *Samurai* were marked as noble warriors by the wearing of swords and the mastery of their use. Because of the close relationship between the *Katana* and the *Samurai*, and the *Samurai's* effect upon Japanese culture, it would seem both plausible and logical to suggest that the sword itself would have had an affect on Japanese society as well.

Scholars of Japanese art and culture have often pointed out that the development of certain Japanese artifacts and the society of Japan are closely intertwined. For example, Lubor Hajex, a critic of Japanese graphic art, says in his book Japanese Graphic Art :

Japan is one of the few countries in the world where the relationship between the creative arts and the development of society's productive and social structures has nearly always been evident and unequivocal. (Hajex, 1976, p. 10)

The viewpoint expressed by Hajex would seem to support my theory that an artifact such as the sword could have influenced other areas of the Japanese culture. Despite these facts which suggest there is a connection between the sword and Japan's culture, to my knowledge, as mentioned earlier, no study of the



subject has been published to date. It is for these reasons, primarily the absence of a previous study and the opportunity to discuss original and uncovered ground, that I have chosen to write my thesis on this subject.

In the process of identifying the various possible effects of the sword on the culture of Japan, I intend to examine its role in the context of specific areas such as medieval society, religion and drama, among others. In dealing with these widely differing areas there arises the constant danger of straying from the main point of this thesis and becoming involved in complex and irrelevant discussions concerning the details of these various areas.

In order to avoid taking such tangent routes I intend to concentrate on discussing the most obvious and easily isolated cases where the sword may have had an influence. I will endeavour to sustain arguments for these influences by supporting my suggestions with relevant quotes and references from authors whose works, while not discussing the sword's influence over the Japanese people do ,however, provide information which can be used as evidence to support my argument, namely that the sword may have influenced both the arts and culture of Japan.

The format of my thesis will be that of an examination of the sword's possible influences divided into chapters discussing the effects of the sword within specific areas of Japan's culture. The cultural sections I will discuss are as follows -

*SAMURAI SOCIETY*

*RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY*

*TRADITIONAL COSTUME*

*TRADITIONAL THEATRE*

*JAPANESE PRINTS*

*TWENTIETH CENTURY JAPAN*

Within these chapters I will discuss possible effects of the sword on the art forms associated with these specific areas as well as the sword's possible influences on the rituals, traditions and beliefs surrounding these sections of Japan's cultural life. As I cover these individual elements of Japanese society I intended to build an argument to support the theory that the sword may have had a strong influence upon the Japanese people. As result of the differing nature of the elements discussed, I hope it shall become evident that the possibility of the sword affecting the whole of Japanese culture is a strong one.

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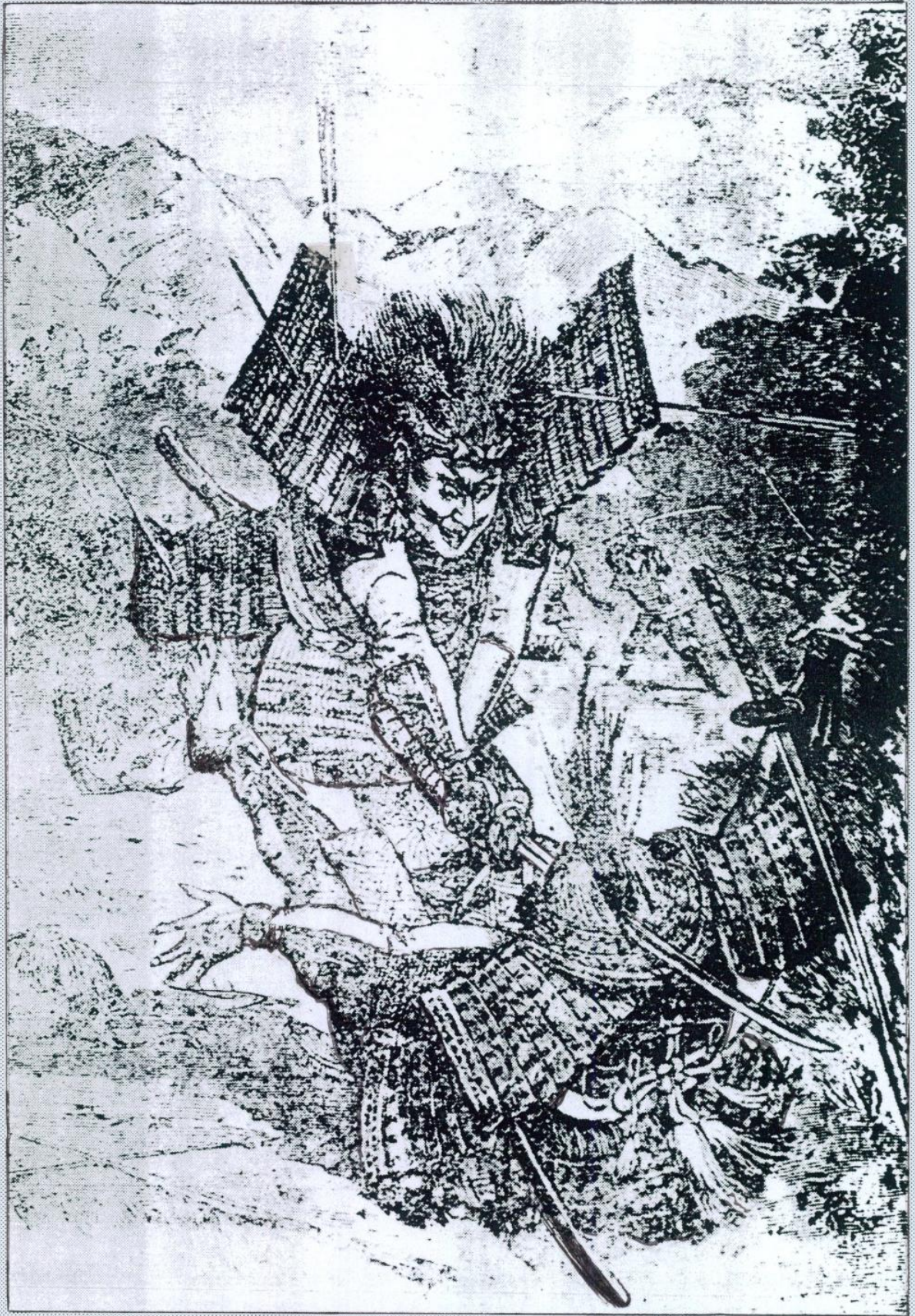


FIGURE 1: Print denomstrating sword,s cutting power



## CHAPTER ONE:

### THE SWORD'S EFFECT ON SAMURAI SOCIETY.

In this section I intend to examine the possible effects of the *Katana* within the medieval society of Japan. Although I will also mention the influences from this period that persist until the present day, I will deal with these in full in the chapter 6.

#### The Sword as a Weapon.

Today the Japanese sword is generally regarded as a cutting weapon of the highest order. This is confirmed by B. H. Bolger In his book The Traditional Arts of Japan where Bolger describes the Japanese sword as "unsurpassed by even the swords of damascus, Persia and India". (Bolger, 1964, p. 111) The blade was created to withstand forces greater than any it might ever reasonably be expected to ever face in battle. P. Lewis in his book Martial Arts of the Orient, describes how swords of top quality were "famed as being capable of cutting through marble." (Lewis, 1985, p 158)

Figure 1, a 17th century woodblock print, seems to support the reputed cutting power of the Japanese blade. The print was produced at a time when the sword was still widely used in battle and is likely to be an accurate depiction of the *Katana's* abilities. The sword is seen to cut cleanly through the helmet and head of an unfortunate *Samurai*, a feat requiring a razor sharp and immensely strong weapon. This print is discussed in further detail in chapter 5.

The fact that the swords of Japan are arguably the best in the world is due to the extraordinary and thorough workmanship that went into their creation. The high quality of the *Katana's* production suggest it must have been important as more than just armament. As a weapon the sword had to be efficient, reliable and practical as well as strong. S. R. Turnbull, in his book



The Samurai, describes the Japanese sword as ".....first and foremost a weapon for killing other *Samurai*....". (Turnbull, 1982 p. 66) But the sword was also created to be beautiful. To Western eyes the katana is regarded as both a weapon and a work of art. And while this is true for the Japanese also, the sword is a symbol of much more in Japan.

The excessive strength of the blade, coupled with the fact that the sword was beautiful beyond its immediate function, suggests that the sword was an extremely important object to the *Samurai*. I believe that this sword, the *Katana*, is and has been an icon of social status and physical power as well as a weapon of war. It is with regard to these aspects that the most dramatic and relevant effects of the weapon are to be found.

#### The Sword as an Instrument of Power.

Japan is country with a long feudal history with the many provincial Lords or *Daimyo*, and their respective clans struggling for supremacy. During this time the soldier was little more than a pawn in the battles between these clan leaders. But in the 1500s all this changed and these soldiers became some of the most powerful and venerated individuals in Japan's history. It can be argued that the sword quite possibly played a fundamental role in these events. According to Turnbull,

The most important development in the medieval history of Japan...( the rise of the *Samurai* to power)... took place around the end of the *Muromachi* times and the start of the *Monoyama* period. ( 1568-1603 )" ( Turnbull, 1982, p. 72-74 )

It was during this time that the military classes consolidated power and the lowly soldier was elevated to the status of noble warrior. These warriors were to become known as the *Samurai*, and to be regarded as among the world's greatest swordsmen. It is therefore not surprising to note that it was also at this time that the Japanese sword or *Katana* in the form that it is known today first appeared.





FIGURE 2: Katana, Long Sword, Wakazashi, Short Sword.



The emergence of the *Katana* at the end *Muromachi* period indicates that it may have been an important factor in the *Samurai's* rise to power. After all, the *Samurai* were primarily warriors; reliant on their weapon, namely the sword. The possible reasons for the sword's influence can be seen when examining the changes it went through at this time and the way its use in battle was altered.

In his book, The Craft of the Sword, the modern day Japanese swordsmith *Kapp* notes that during this period the single long sword of the Japanese soldier evolved into "...a pair of blades that could be worn at the waist." (Kapp 1987 p 22) The larger of these two swords and the most easily recognisable by Westerners is the aforementioned *Katana*, a curved blade ranging anywhere from 24 to 30 inches in length. The companion to this blade, its name indeed meaning companion sword, was the shorter *Wakizashi*. This second weapon was about 18 inches long. Figure 2 gives a clear example of the slandered format of the *Katana* and *Wakizashi*. The swords seen in this photograph, while authentic in ever detail, are in fact modern and exacting copies of museum pieces. These reproductions are popular among the Japanese public, which suggests that the sword is still a coveted possession to the Japanese.

The blade was now more effective for fighting on the open battlefield when using the long *Katana*, as well as being useful in cramped conditions such as indoors when using the *Wakizashi*. The new curved blade was now also an extremely effective weapon on horseback as well as on foot. Being curved like all cavalry sabers the *Katana* could be swung easily while in the saddle.

Indications that the development of the two blades may have contributed to the *Samurai's* rise to power can be seen when examining battles taking place at this time. During and prior to



the Muromachi period it was considered more important to arm as many men as possible with any form of weapon than to arm them with high quality swords. An example of this can be found when Turnbull cites a passage from the house law of a *Diamyo* (clan leader) called *Asakura*. This quote predating the rise of the *Samurai* (Circa 1480 A.D.). backs up my previous comments.

Do not excessively covet swords and daggers made by famous masters. Even if you can own a sword worth ten thousand pieces it can be overcome by one hundred spears each worth one hundred pieces. Therefore use the ten thousand pieces to obtain a hundred spears and arm a hundred men with them. Thus you can defend yourself in war. (Turnbull, 1982, p. 66)

While *Asakura's* theory may seem logical, Japanese history and modern warfare would seem to suggest that the best armed forces are more likely to be triumphant even if outnumbered. The *Katana* was designed to be a weapon capable of cutting well and not breaking or failing in battle. The failure of cheap weapons often cost even the most skillful warrior his life. Soldiers were also uninspired to train, inclining not to waste time trying and becoming familiar with a weapon which might fail, leaving them to become acquainted with a new one. Whatever the reason, most of the battles fought before the appearance of the *Katana* were indecisive, helping to prolong Japan's feudal system. However, as the *Samurai* began to covet better weapons, namely the two swords, battles became more decisive, allowing them to take power in the country. This was probably due to the sword's superior capabilities as a weapon.

The battles which the *Katana* was used indicate it had a major effect. Bryant in his book *The Samurai*, cites an example of one such battle that supports my argument. In 1560, while battles to secure the Japanese throne raged, Bryant states that two *Diamyo* came into conflict, *Yoshimoto* and *Nobunaga*. *Yoshimoto* gathered as many men as possible at the expense of good weaponry. *Nobunaga* exhausted his wealth on gathering but a few men well trained and armed with expensive swords. *Yoshimoto's* forces of







*FIGURE 3: 19th Century Sword Bearing Samurai.*



Two black-lacquered Tensho-style wooden scabbards with braided hilts, by Kazuyuki Takayama. The longer scabbard is for a *katana* and is fitted with a sword guard. The shorter, guardless scabbard is for a *tanto*, or dagger. This simple style of mounting was popular during the Tensho era (1573–91), from which its name derives.



FIGURE 4: Functional Swords From the Tensho Era.

25,000 outnumbered *Nobunaga's* 2,000 by more than twelve to one. The result was astounding, within fifteen minutes on the open battlefield *Yoshimoto* was dead and his forces defeated. (Bryant, 1993, p25-27) This victory and others like it reinforced the sword as the principle weapon of battle.

### The Sword as a Status Symbol.

By the late 1500s as Japan became more peaceful, mainly because the *Samurai* now ruled the country with an iron fist, or perhaps more accurately a steel sword. During this period the effects of the sword as a symbol of status as well as a powerful weapon began to make themselves apparent. The wearing of two swords became the custom and badge of the nobility and remained so until the late 19th century. Figure 3 shows a 19th century *Samurai* in a curious mixture of European and Japanese styles of military dress. This photograph was taken during the early *Meiji* period (1860-1930), and highlights the transition of Japanese culture to a more western form. Despite the western dress, the sword still has pride of place at the *Samurai's* side.

At the beginning of the 16th century a warrior called *Toyotomi Hideyoshi* effectively unified the country to bring years of feudal conflict to an end. Turnbull notes how for decades peasants were never allowed to wear swords. He describes also that in 1588 A.D. *Toyotomi* issued a decree forbidding anyone other than the *Samurai* from even possessing a sword. (Turnbull, 1982, p 195-212) This ban had two obvious effects, the *Samurai* who possessed the only swords now controlled the working classes by force. Secondly, now that the swords were used less in battle, they became more important as a social mark of rank than purely as a weapon. This suggestion can be backed up by observing the change in decoration of swords during this period. For example, figure 4, , shows the *Tensho* swords by *Kazuyui Takayama* (1573/91). These swords are extremely simple and highly functional. But the swords after 1588 became immensely





FIGURE 7: Photo of 19th Century Doctor Wearing Swords.





*FIGURE 6: Print Depicting Sword As Formal Wear.*







Black- and vermilion-lacquered scabbards with braided hilts, by Kazuyuki Takayama. Both are for *katana*. Ray-skin is embedded in the wet lacquer and polished until smooth to create the design.

Wooden scabbard for a *tachi* decorated with gold flakes suspended in lacquer and gold hollyhock crests and silver fittings, by Hiroshi Miyajima. Gold and silver crests are soldered onto the hilt.

FIGURE 5: Decorative Swords From The Late Tokugawa Period.



decorative with highly lacquered scabbards, gold thread ornament, and enamel guards and hilts known as *Tsuba* in Japanese, examples of these swords can be seen in figure 5. This seems to indicate that sword was now having an effect in purely social terms, as a status symbol. The sword was the badge of the *Samurai*, an icon of power as well as the physical means to enforce that power.

An example of this badge-like use of the sword can be seen in figure 6. This print from the 1800s depicts a *Samurai* walking outside during a rain storm. He carries his essential umbrella and is dressed in fine cloths. He also carries a large purse. These possessions combined with his haughty expression suggest he is flaunting his wealth and status. Indeed the print depicts Asahina Tóbei, a arrogant *Samurai* character from the traditional theatre. It is interesting to note that the sword features prominently as a part of Asahine's formal dress.

The only non-*Samurai* exempt from the sword ban were those the *Samurai* were forced to deal with on a personal level, such as swordsmiths and doctors. They were allowed to wear swords and even boast a surname, usually only the right of the military class. Photographic evidence confirms this exemption. Figure 7 shows a doctor treating a *Samurai*. Doctors were one of the few groups of people in *Tokugawa* Japan who were regarded as being outside the class system. Note the sword worn by the doctor. To deal with these professions like as doctors on such an intimate level it was more socially acceptable to raise them to the level of pseudo-*Samurai*.

The sword ban had more serious implications for the peasant classes. Both Lewis and Turnbull describe a law known as *Kiriste Gomen*. Lewis quotes this law which states,

Common people who behave unbecomingly towards members of the military classes, or show want of respect to direct or indirect vassals may be cut down on the spot. (Lewis, 1985, p. 152)



Reid also describes in his book, Way of the Warrior, an even more barbaric practice. He states that at this time it was common for a new sword's cutting ability to be tested on any innocent peasant passing by. (Reid,1983, p.118) Prior to the sword ban, which made peasants an easy target, swords were treated in a slightly less barbaric way. Bolger describes how new blades were tested "... by cutting up corpses of persons who had paid the death penalty." (Bolger,1964, p.110). However Lewis points out that after the sword ban these convicted criminals were often decapitated using the blade to be tested prior to dismemberment. (Lewis, 1985, p. 152)

The fact that innocent and live victims replaced dead criminals after the sword ban suggests that the exclusive possession of swords by the *Samurai* lessened their regard for the life of the lower classes.

### The Sword and The Martial Arts.

It can also be argued that the unprovoked attacks using swords, coupled with the peasants' own lack of weapons, was instrumental in the development of Japan's unarmed martial arts.

The sword at this stage was already responsible for the formation of the martial arts of *Kendo*, *Kenjitsu* and *Aiejitsu*, which are all forms of fencing. The unarmed martial arts of *Judo*, *Jujitsu* and *Akido* were all developed by the *Samurai*. These arts used techniques developed from the already established sword arts.

The martial arts of peasant resistance such as *Karate* were designed to counteract the use of the sword and other fighting skills developed by the *Samurai*. This theory is backed by the late Ed Parker, founder of Kenpo Karate and the man credited with introducing the art to the West, in his book, Insights Into Kenpo. Here he states that *Karate* developed in the Japanese colony of









*FIGURE 10: Modern Martial Artists Training with Sword And Sai.*







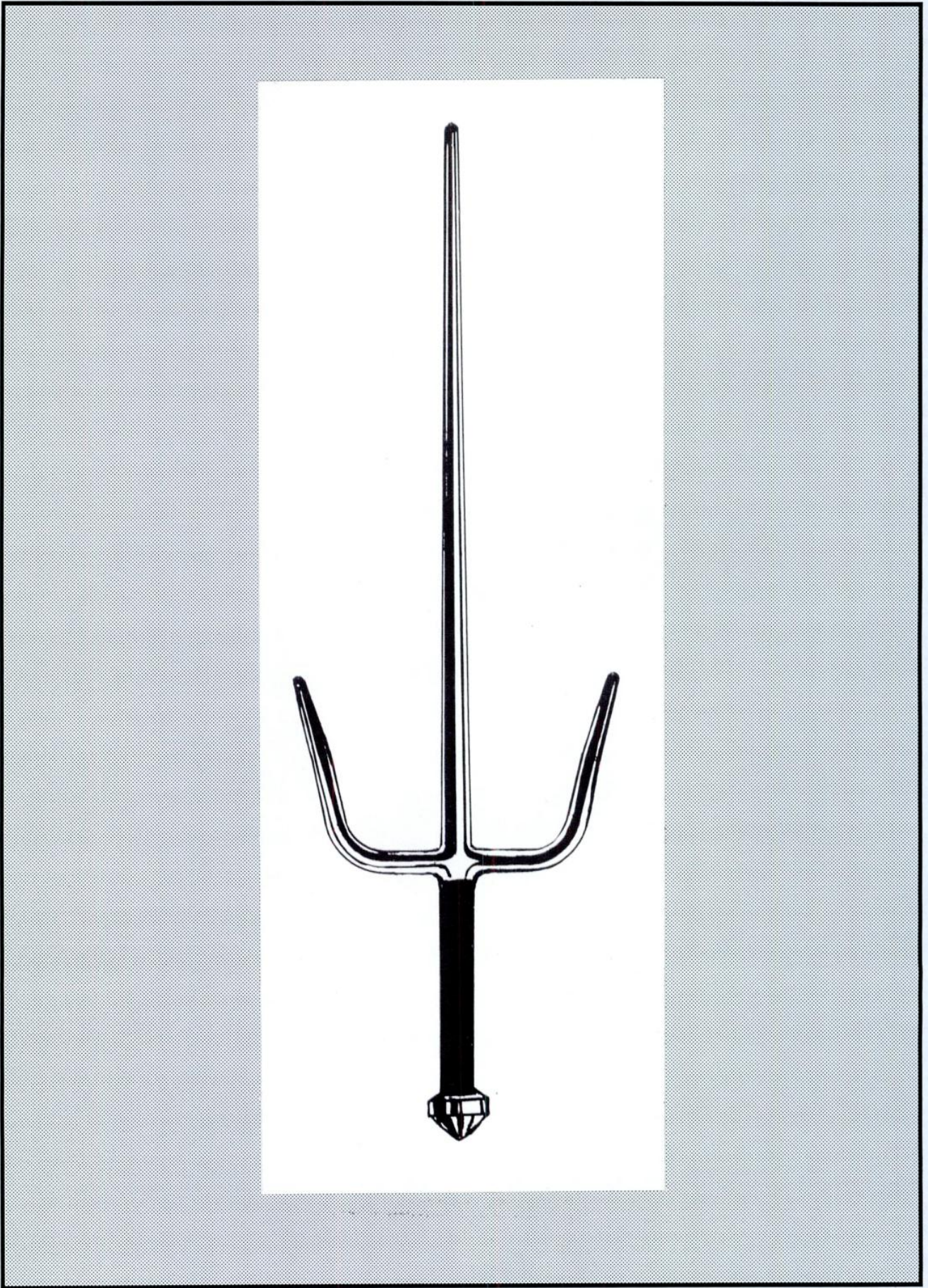


FIGURE 9: Diagrams Of The Sai In Use.









*FIGURE 8: The Sai, Anti- Sword Weapon.*



*Okinawa* in response to the sword ban and the *Samurai's* brutality. (Parker, 1982, p.7-42). *Karate* has also borrowed combat techniques originally developed for the use of the sword. For example the fabled karate chop is correctly known as a "Sword hand strike". This is because the movement of a sword cut is mimicked by the movement of the chopping hand. Other techniques such the "Blade Kick" and "Finger sword strike" were all adapted from sword techniques.

The Okinawans also developed many farm implements into weapons to combat the sword. The most commonly used of these weapons was the *Sai*. It was specially created to catch the blade and brake it. Figure 8 shows the physical form of the *Sai* while figure 9 demonstrates the weapon in use. Lewis states that the *Sai* developed from a short handled pitchfork. This weapon is still used by *Karateka* ( *Karate* practitioners) to to this day in anti-sword techniques. (Lewis, 1985, p.150-154) ( fig 10).

#### The Sword's effect on Trade.

As well as affecting the martial arts it can be argued that the sword had an effect upon the international trade of medieval Japan. Japan has few natural resources and was an is forced to import many items. Before its industrialisation after World War Two one of the few items exported by the Japanese were swords. Turnbull notes how during the *Muromachi* period the Japanese exported "30,000 swords in one shipment which led to a major disagreement over the price which they were fetching in China." (Turnbull, 1982, p. 66) The sword obviously affected trading prices as Turnbull's comment shows, but I believe its influence went far further.

Through trade with the Chinese and Dutch simple flintlock muskets were introduced to Japan. These weapons were of a single shot nature and were rejected as crude by the Samurai, the Japanese long bow had a comparably range and was easier to use.



but with the introduction of European cannons and artillery began to threaten the sword supremacy on the battlefield. With a modicum of training a soldier could be quickly taught to use a gun or cannon. The use of a sword on the other hand took years to master. Lewis describes how the *Samurai* "... practiced up to 3,000 cuts a day, just to keep themselves up to scratch". (Lewis, 1985, p. 158)

Perhaps this undermining of the sword by foreign technology created within the *Samurai* a fear of being deposed. At any rate, in 1603 A.D., all connections with the outside world were abruptly severed. Turnbull notes that in this year the then ruler *Toyotomi* was succeeded by *Tokugawa Ieyasu*, the first *Shogun* of Japan. The *Shogun* replaced the emperor as absolute ruler. *Tokugawa Ieyasu* imposed trade restrictions that isolated Japan for more than two hundred years. (Turnbull, 1982 p. 138-143) This period marks the beginning of what historians have come to term "the cult of the sword". It can be argued that in the absence of foreign firearms the sword remained the dominant power on the battlefield and thus maintained the status quo.

### Sword Etiquette.

During this period of isolation the *Katana* became probably the most important and influential artifact in symbolic terms that any culture has ever had. All *Samurai* society revolved around the *Katana*. *Tokugawa Ieyasu*, who was no stranger to the potential of the sword as a weapon, having taken power by force, was also a connoisseur of the finer points of a blade that went far beyond its capacity to kill. Through the *Shogun's* influence the sword's image as a work of art and a status symbol was reinforced. *Kapp* notes how swords would be presented to the *Shogun* for his comments , and how swords were much prized as gifts and rewards. ( Kapp, 1987, p. 33-42)



Thus, because of their association with *Ieyasu*, swords began to hold pure material value as well as aesthetic and social significance. Even in today's Japanese business world the sword is viewed as an investment commodity and fetches high prices.

During the *Tokugawa* period a whole new system of etiquette revolving around the sword came into being. Turnbull describes this etiquette, stating that to touch another's weapon or to bump into the scabbard was considered a serious offense. While to enter a friend's home without first removing and leaving one's sword outside was an unforgivable breach of friendship. Those whose position required it, would often hire a retainer who would look after the sword on such occasions.

(Turnbull, 1982, p. 138-182)

It was still customary to wear two swords at this time. The short sword or *Wakizashi* was used in close quarter combat and probably evolved from the *Tanto*, or dagger, which was worn in its place before the *Wakizashi* appeared in the 1500s. While the *Katana* was not permissible indoors the *Wakizashi* was. (Turnbull, 1982, p. 138/182) Bolger mentions in passing that the roof height of the average domestic building was sufficiently high to allow an overhead blow to be delivered by the *Wakizashi*. (Bolger, 1964, p. 147)

This is unlikely to be a lucky coincidence, the roof height was probably designed to accommodate the short sword. Bolger also notes that ceremonial halls contained much higher ceilings. (Bolger, 1964, p. 147) This is most likely due to the fact that it was permissible to wear a *Katana* indoors on special occasions; if drawn in self defence or for ritual purposes the longer blade would require a higher clearance level. In most countries temples and churches have higher ceilings but the halls I am concerned with are audience chambers of castles and stately homes, not religious buildings. Because of these factors it is plausible to







suggest that the sword may have had an affect on traditional Japanese architecture, even if only to a minor extent.

The etiquette of the sword led to it being treated as a sacred object. *Kapp* describes the ceremonies connected with examining swords. To exhibit a naked blade was considered insulting unless a connoisseur wished to show someone a prized possession. In this case the sword would be handed by the owner to the guest with the hilt towards the guest, who would then draw the weapon from its scabbard inch by inch, but never to its full extent unless the owner pressed the guest to do so. If the guest was so requested, he would draw the blade with much apology and hold it pointed upwards away from anyone present. ( *Kapp*, 1987, p. 33/42) Reid describes practices identical to those described by *Kapp* which are strict rules abided to by connoisseurs handling swords in Japan to this day.

These rituals also tell us more about how the *Samurai* thought of the sword. It seemed to be regarded as part of the *Samurai* himself. Viewing the blade was treated like uncovering naked flesh. The blade had become regarded as an almost holy object. This association between the weapon and the divine is not unlike that to be found in the Aztec and Inca cultures regarding sacrificial blades, and those of Celtic pagan societies regarding the Shaman's knife called the *Atháme*.

Just how sacred the *Katana* was and how much it was considered a part of its owner can be ascertained from the statement attributed to *Tokugawa*. Turnbull and Bolger both quote *Tokugawa*, "The sword is the soul of the *Samurai*. If any forget it or lose it he will not be excused".(Turnbul, 1982, p. 139) (Bolger, 1964, p.105) From this quote it can be seen that the sword had taken on the dressings of a sacred object. The sword's connection to the sacred is examined in further detail in the next section.



From the evidence presented in this chapter it can be argued that, within the *Samurai* society of Japan (1500 - 1876), the *Katana* had a pronounced affect. The fact that the *Samurai* held power for so long would suggest that the *Katana*, their favoured weapon, would be extremely influential. The sword as weapon of highest quality, most likely gave the *Samurai* the necessary advantage to take control of Japan. It became a decisive factor in battle. The ban on the owning of swords by peasants gave the ruling classes total power and gave rise to a iron clad class system. The ban also seemed to make the *Katana* a status symbol. This sword ban sword almost certainly created the impetus that produced all of Japan's unarmed martial arts and shaped the armed arts. Etiquette and rituals evolved around the sword, making it arguably the most revered object in Japan's history. Perhaps most importantly, because of fears of foreign weaponry, the *Katana* probably contributed to Japan's 200 year isolation which furthered the existence of an environment in which the sword remained an important weapon of war, and thus an important symbol.

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## CHAPTER TWO:

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SWORD IN RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY.

In this section I shall examine the effects of the sword on the spiritual beliefs of the Japanese. As mentioned in the previous section the most important areas of the sword's influence have been those concerning status and power. This holds true when discussing religion and philosophy in Japan.

#### The Sword as a Symbol of Religious Authority.

The sword as a symbol of status was adopted by the religions of Japan in order to lend them power and authority. Examples of this can be traced back to the sword's earliest history. From the sword's inception it has been coveted by the *Shinto* church, the indigenous religion of Japan. Both Kapp and Bolger refer to the sword's legendary origins. They state that according to the beliefs of the *Shinto* church, the sword, along with a jewel and a mirror, were bestowed upon the Japanese royal family as divine gifts. The *Shinto* Sun Goddess purportedly bestowed the sword and other gifts upon her grandson the Emperor, confirming his authority to rule. (Kapp, 1987, p.18, Bolger, 1964, p. 105)

Lowell in his book, Occult Japan, describes how in *Shinto* the mirror is used to scry with, or see the future, in much the same way as a crystal ball is in the West. Thus in Japan the mirror is symbolic of wisdom and self awareness. (Lowell, 1894, p. 128) The jewel is presumably symbolic of wealth. Therefore it can be argued that within its legendary origins the sword is the most important of the three gifts as it formed the basis of the Emperor's authority over the armed forces. The mirror would provide wisdom in the sword's use and the jewel would eliminate material need, preventing greed from affecting the Emperor's judgement.



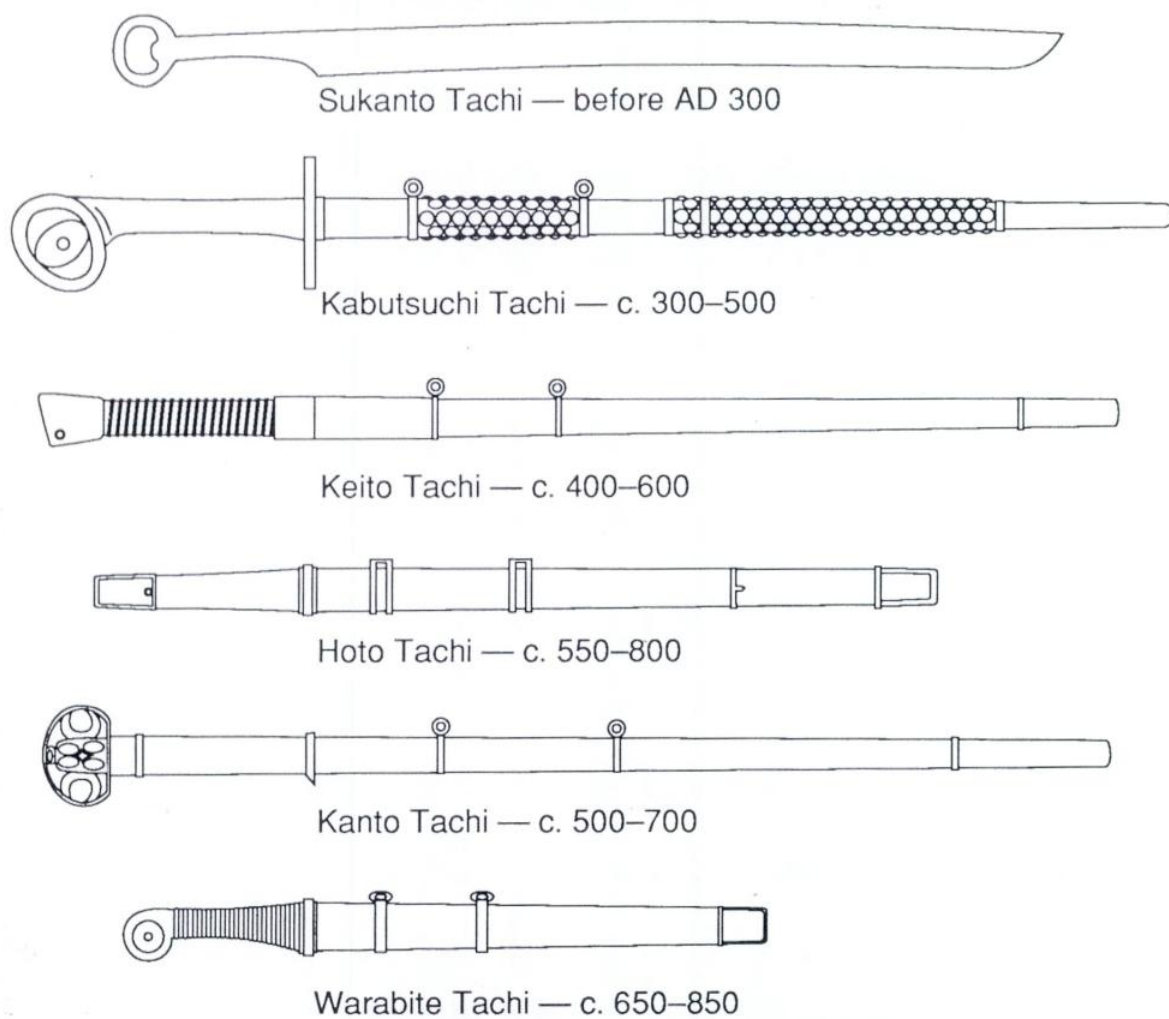


FIGURE 11. Early Japanese Swords.



This legend confirms the sword's status as an icon of power. The legend's origins are unknown but it seems most likely that the *Shinto* church and the Emperor colluded to covet the sword's creation, claiming to be its divine sacred source in order to establish themselves as the legitimate controllers of the weapon. This legend would have aided in persuading men who lived by the sword, the *Samurai*, to serve the Emperor and the church out of religious devotion. This would seem to have been the course of events. The *Samurai* were known for their religious devotion to their masters. This willingness to serve is evident by examining the word "*Samurai*" itself; Turnbull points out that the name *Samurai* means "Those who serve." (Turnbull, 1982, p. 66)

### The Sword's Origin.

The true origin of the Japanese sword dates back more than 1,500 years but these, too, have religious connections. According to Kapp the oldest swords found in Japan were recovered from tombs dating back to the fourth and fifth centuries. (Kapp, 1987, p.19-21) Kapp states that these blades are...

...straight and have a single cutting edge...some of these are so thin that when held parallel to the ground they bend under their own weight... a number of them have particularly polished blades and clearly have hand forged steel as well as hardened cutting edge (Kapp, 1987, p. 19/23)

Figure 11 shows examples of these early swords in diagrammatic form. These blades are straight and similar to contemporary Chinese weapons. All of these swords are *Tachi* or long swords. However, when comparing the *Warabite Tachi* (c. 650-850) to the longer *Tachi* the latter forms of the *Katana* and *Wakizashi* spring to mind.

The fact that these weapons were discovered in burial sites suggests that the sword was fundamental in defining the status of the dead and had religious significance in the afterlife. It is also plausible to suggest that because of the weak nature of these





FIGURE 12: *Dance At Kasuga Shrine, Nara.*



blades they were never intended for use as weapons and served only ceremonial purposes. Even the light foils and sabres of Europe were never this fragile. These facts strengthen the possibility that the sword had influence upon the religious beliefs in Japan's proto-history. (10,000 B.C. - 500 A.D.)

Not much is known about the earliest swordsmiths. During the *Tokugawa* period all swordsmiths were considered artists and signed their work. But few records of swordsmiths exist prior to the 14th century. However it is interesting to note that the only records of smiths that do exist before this time are those attached to guilds located at shrines and in temples. The swords produced in these location were most likely made solely for religious purpose. Comments by *Kapp* back up this theory. *Kapp* states:

Smiths were expected to produce swords exclusively for these temples and to partake in religious affairs and ceremonies. The connection continues to this day, in both the form of purification ceremonies, sometimes undertaken before forging, an the manufacture of new swords for the consecration of a religious building." (Kapp, 1987, p. 22)

Figure 12 portrays a sacred dance at the *Kasuga* shine, *Nara*. Note the swords worn by the priests. This is a very ancient ceremony, however, this photo was taken in 1978 and the ceremony is still practiced today. This shows the importance of the sword in *Shinto*, as formal dress at least, to the present day.

### **The Sword and Shinto Mysticism.**

*Shinto* is a highly esoteric religion bordering on the occult. Within such religions strong connections between smiths and the church were not uncommon. For example Conway in her work The Book of Celtic Magic describes how within Celtic pagan religions blacksmiths ;" Ranked high in the social order because they were trained in religious practices and special magic."(Conway, 1992, p. 81).

This connection between religion and swordsmiths may be





*FIGURE 13: Shinto God Wielding Sword, 8th Century.*



another reason why the *Samurai* accepted them into their class system.

It seems that the transformation of metals, especially into weapons, is considered a powerful, almost magical act by esoteric religions such as *Shinto*. Perhaps the *Shinto* church in Japan wished to possess this power or appear to be its source by controlling the swordsmiths.

This much is certain, production of swords for temples had two major affects on religion in Japan. Firstly these swords were instrumental in the performance of "miracles" which the *Shinto* church used to confirm its power and authority. Lowell describes how during the 18th and 19th centuries the local populace was encouraged to witness *Shinto* priests undergo ordeals to prove their holiness. Lowell states that these priests seemed to survive ordeals that would normally injure or kill the average man. Among these tests are acts such as dousing with scalding water, traversing burning coals, and culminating with the most dramatic act of all, the climbing of a ladder made of razor sharp swords (Lowell, 1894, p. 37-96). It is clear from Lowell's experience that the *Shinto* priests wished to impress their power on the minds of the public. It is also clear that the sword was seen as the most impressive way to accomplish this.

### Buddhism, Zen and The Sword.

The second major affect of the sword's production for temples took place during the 5th century A.D. It was at this time that Buddhism, now the most common religion in Japan, arrived. The Buddhist Church was quick to adopt many of the *Shinto* forms and rituals into their own practices. For example, sword wielding *Shinto* deities bear a strong resemblance Buddhist deities welding swords. Figure 13 shows a *Shinto* deity, *Jikoku-ten*, from the eight century. This war deity possesses the frightful power it should, but it is not shown in the obvious way. The expression of the face is









*FIGURE 14: Buddha Wielding Sword, 9th Century.*



not filled with the boiling rage usually associated with such a god, instead the artist has relied on the threatening sword being drawn from the scabbard. Now look at the Buddha in Figure 14. This statue also gains authority from the sword it holds. This similarity between Buddhism's symbolic use of the sword and *shinto* was most likely undertaken in an effort to convert the aboriginal population away from their indigenous religion of *Shinto*. The veneration of the sword was among these practices incorporated. However the Buddhist clergy were to take this interest several stages further.

Today the Japanese people are extremely tolerant of differing religious beliefs. The freedom to practice any religion has been written into their constitution and a number of people practice both Shinto and Buddhism at the same time. (Japan Today, 1993 p. 98 ) Neither faith seems to find fault with this double standard. But this was not always the case.

Throughout Japan's history, as different political leaders have come to power, they have banned and persecuted one form of religion in favour of another. For example both Turnbull and Lewis state that upon Buddhism's arrival in Japan it refused to recognise the Emperor's control of the sword, and therefore the army, bestowed on him by the *Shinto* Sun Goddess.

The resulting conflict about whether Buddhism should be accepted led to civil war, won in 587 A.D. by a contender to Japan's throne, *Soga Uji*. (Turnbull, 1982, p.10-11)(Lewis, 1985, p. 113/25) Under *Soga* and his successor Buddhism dominated Japanese life for over 80 years. Buddhism was proclaimed the state religion, this was probably because *Shinto* supported the Emperor and his claim to the control of the sword and the army, and did not recognise *Soga*. Buddhism flourished until the death of *Soga's* successor *Shotoku* in 622 A.D. Then the various religious factions became embroiled in a blood thirsty power struggle over which doctrine should be designated as the state religion.









FIGURE 15: Photo Of Yamabushi Warrior Monk, Note Sword.



The resultant persecution of Buddhist sects led to the creation of the *Yamabushi* or warrior priests of Japan. Figure 15 shows a 19th century reconstruction of a *Yamabushi* monk. These monks lived almost constantly in a state of warfare, note the sword worn at the right hip. The *Yamabushi* used their control of sword smiths to arm small armies of monks devoted to the study of sword play. Because of their ability in sword combat, the most common form of battle in medieval Japan, the *Yamabushi* were able to keep Buddhism alive and began to influence the tide of warfare and politics. Bryant says of this...

These bands of *Yamabushi* were virtually private armies ...and the different sects were ever ready to argue their positions with the assistance of a sword point... as the power of the temples grew they began to attempt to influence court policy...often making forays into *Kyoto*(the then capital - during the 11,00s ) to press their demands.  
(Bryant, 1991, p. 12/13)

It can be argued that without the control of sword production and skill in the use of its produce the *Yamabushi* might never have secured Buddhism's place in Japan. Because of the *Yamabushi*'s renowned skill in sword play, many *Samurai* were attracted to study at their temples. Of the vast numbers studying at these temples Bryant states that ; "...only a small minority were actually members of the clergy." (Bryant, 1991, p. 13) It is natural therefore to assume that as the *Samurai* studied the sword arts under the guidance of Buddhist priests the teaching of the Buddhist church were ingrained in them. In particular the philosophies of *Zen* Buddhism lend themselves well to the arts of sword fighting. In his book, Elements of Zen, Scott states : " The essence of *Zen* is the quieting of the mind.....allowing the spirit to flow." (Scott, 1992, p. 13) Kapp when talking of sword play says , " The warrior had to learn how to make his spirit flow unobstructedly into the tip of the blade. He could not be over eager,... and yet could not fear pain or death."(Kapp, 1987, p. 18) Of life and death Scott states that through *Zen* meditation the ego is destroyed and " life and death become just passing phenomena on the stage of the unconscious...this appealed to the military classes for a number of reasons...it valued direct



experience over intellectual speculation...development of a courageous self , self reliance and an aesthetic personality, all attributes which a warrior would find attractive."  
(Scott,1992, p. 97).

Thus these quotes suggest the argument that the sword and sword fighting were largely responsible for the acceptance of Zen by the Samurai and furthermore, through the sword's influence on other martial arts and the affect of the Samurai's values on modern Japanese thinking it can be argued that the sword is partly responsible for Zen's widespread following today.

### The Philosophy of The Sword.

The Zenlike philosophy of swordplay has extended far beyond the confines of the combat for which it was designed. Many masters of swordplay were accepted masters of philosophy and wrote texts of the spiritual nature of the martial arts. The definitive work o this subject is Go Rin No Sho, or The Book Of Five Rings by Miyamoto Musashi.(1584/1645) Miyamoto Musashi is generally considered to have been the greatest swordsman ever to have lived.

In his translation of The Book Of Five Rings, Harris points out that within the martial arts community of Japan today Musashi is known as "Kensei, that is sword saint..." (Harris,1974, p. 19). This nickname clearly demonstrates the skill Musashi is believed to have had while again reminding us of the sword's strong connection to religion. The effects this philosophical work extended beyond the realm of the spirit to all areas of modern Japanese life, in particular the business world. However I will deal with this aspect of the sword's influence in chapter 6.

Considering the facts presented in this section it would seem reasonable to suggest that the sword has had an important role in shaping the religious and philosophical beliefs of the Japanese



past and present. In particular it seems that the *Katana* was coveted by both the royal family and the *Shinto* church in an effort to control the *Samurai*. It seems the sword has moved hand in hand with the development of religion in Japan from *Shinto*'s origins and rituals, and the acceptance of *Zen* Buddhism. In fact it seems probable that the sword was used to speed the acceptance of Buddhist deities. The formation of Buddhist cults using the *Katana* to defend themselves most likely led to the survival of *Zen*. The expertise of the Yamabushi in the use of the blade probably attracted the *Samurai* to adopt *Zen*, this connection between the sword and *Zen* was all most certainly the inspiration behind the *Samurai* philosophy, still active today.

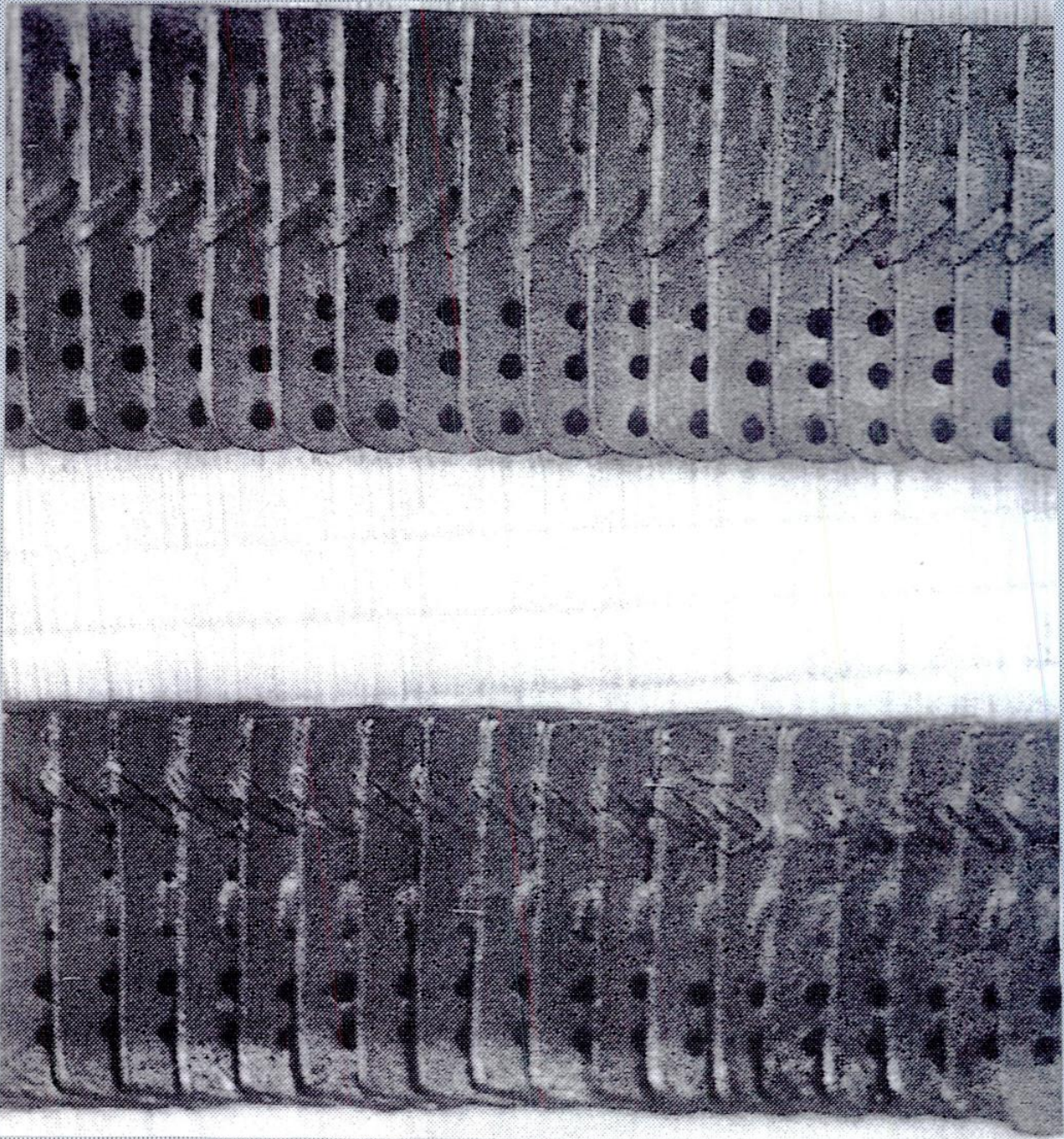
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FIGURE 17: Full Body Armour From Tokugawa Period.





*FIGURE 16: Tiled Formation Of Japanese Armour.*



## CHAPTER THREE:

### THE SWORD'S INFLUENCE ON TRADITIONAL COSTUME.

In this section I will discuss the effects of the *Katana* and *Wakizashi* on the clothing and garments of the *Samurai*. This clothing has become the national costume and traditional dress of Japan and can be seen at various events and pageant to this day. The most obvious garment to be affected by the sword is the armour worn by the *Samurai*, and it is this armour I will examine first.

#### Armour, Protection Against The Sword.

The nature and style of armour worn by the warrior prior to the 4th century is not known. No armour pre-dating the 4th century survives, so there is nothing for us to study. Bryant states that the earliest armour found dates from after the 4th century. It is known as *Kawara* a term related to the modern Japanese word for tile. (Bryant, 1991, p.28)

This armour was constructed of tile-like metal segments. Figure 16 contains an example of this tile formation. These tiles were grouped together in separate plates, each covering a different section of the body. This format changed little throughout Japanese history and remains unchanged from *Tokugawa* times. Figure 17 depicts a suit of armour typical of the sort popular during the *Tokugawa* period. The fact that the armour is constructed of a tile formation from its earliest examples suggests that it was created to shield the soldier against sword blades. The *Katana* is used in a slashing fashion, the lunging and stabbing action of European swordplay is not present in Japanese fencing.

The tile formation gives good protection from a slashing cut but would be less effective against the thrust of a spear or polearm





FIGURE 20: Still Depicting Sword Fight.









*FIGURE 19: Cloth Kote.*







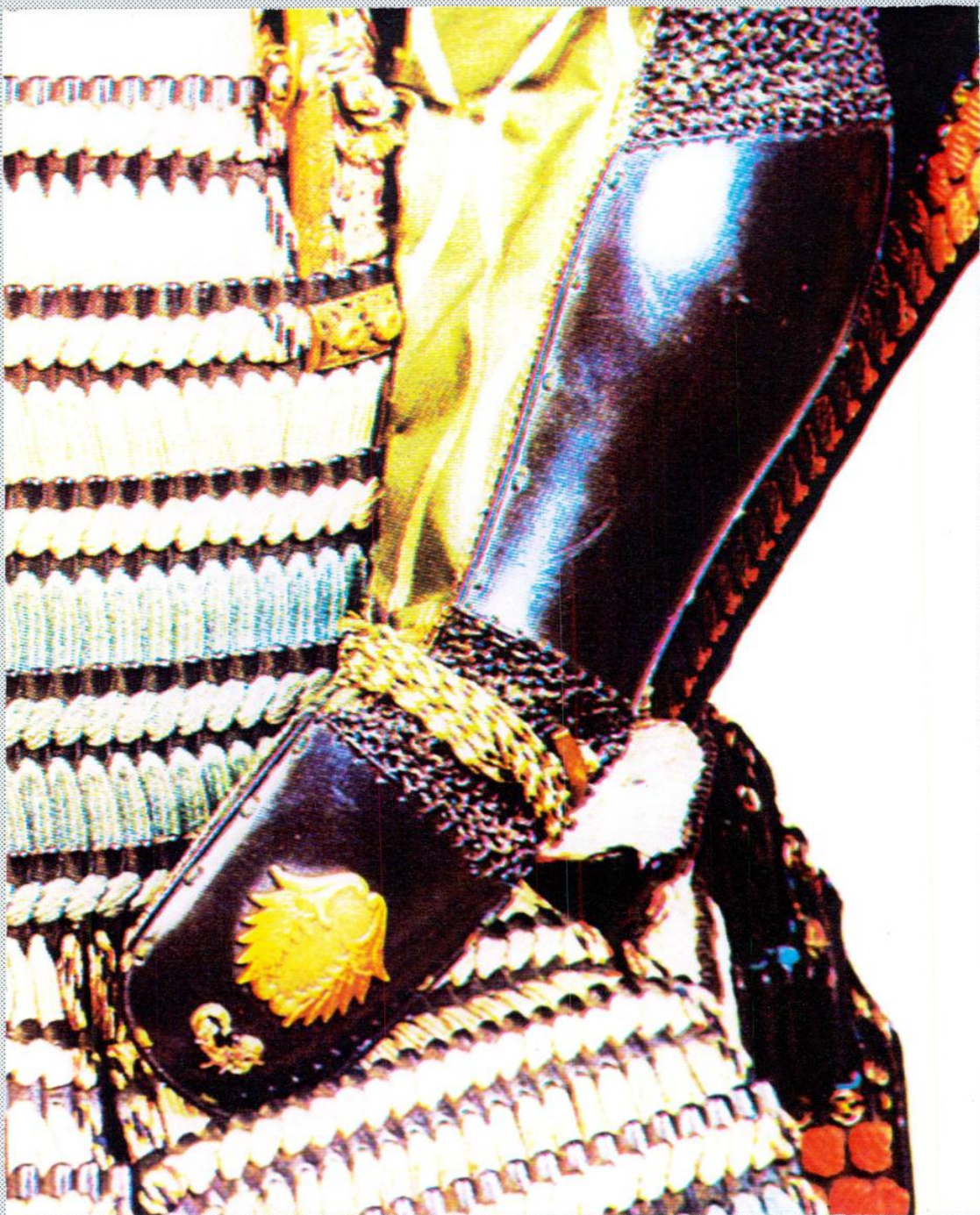


FIGURE 18: Armoured Kote Hand Guard.



and the stabbing action of an arrow. The arrangement of the various sections of armour is also probably a result of the sword's use in battle. The large majority of blows in Japanese swordplay are delivered downward on the head and shoulders, and it is here that the body is best protected by the armour.

A strong steel helmet protected the skull and flaps projecting from its base to protect the neck and shoulders. Long plates also covered the shoulders. The angle of the flaps and plates were designed to glance the sword away from the body. The plates of this armour are separate units and loose fitting. This is unlike the armour of Europe which consisted of an all encompassing solid metal suite. This was probably due to the fact that a high level of freedom of movement was required to execute the techniques of Japanese swordplay.

The helmets also developed large antler-like decorations. These may have been purely decorative. However, they bear a remarkable resemblance in shape to the *Sai*, the peasant weapon for catching swords, and may have been designed to entrap overhead blows from the sword. Compare the helmet in Figure 17 with the *Sai* in Figure 8.

The practice of cutting opponents hands in a sword battle in order to weaken the grip led to the development of hand guards called *Kote*. These in turn led to the wearing of cloth versions which served no practical purpose but were merely fashion accessories. Figure 18 shows the hard Armoured version of the *Kote*, while figure 19 depicts the cloth example which served no protective function.

### The Samurai Garb and The Sword.

The free movement required for Japanese swordplay led to the majority of *Samurai* clothing being of a loose nature. Figure 20 is a still from one of the many Japanese films depicting the *Samurai* and their sword. This reconstruction of a sword battle clearly





FIGURE 22: Samurai Lady Sword Training.





FIGURE 21: Samurai Lady Sword Training.



demonstrates the nature of Japanese swordplay and the loose clothing required to execute these movements.

The majority of Japanese culture is derived from China, including the traditional robe, known as a *Kimono*, worn by both men and women. But unlike the Chinese costume the *Kimono* was baggier and looser fitting. Chinese court robes have long sleeves and often have long hems as well. This would have interfered with the use of the sword in combat.

The Japanese *kimono* was divided for men into a short sleeved jacket called a *Ami-Shimo* and a split skirt known as a *Hakama*, both of these garments can be seen in figure 20. The short sleeves allowed ease of arm movement while wielding the sword. Long sleeves would become entangled with the sword hilt too easily. The split skirt allowed ease of movement while adopting the wide sword stances. The *Kimono* for a woman, who did not need to use the sword, was more like a traditional Chinese robe consisting of one unit.

Both men and women wore an *Obi* or belt. The *Obi* consists of a strong fabric strip folded many times, becoming a thick, hard band. This is in stark contrast to the subtle silk sash sometimes worn by the Chinese. The belt was needed to sheath the swords. Bryant states that ;" The *Katana* was designed to be thrust through the *Obi* edge up."

(Bryant, 1991, p. 13)

This belt refinement added to the speed and cutting action of the sword when it is drawn. Women, while not carrying swords, did carry the swordlike dagger or *Tanto* in their belt. However, while *Samurai* women did not carry sword in everyday life, they were expected to be familiar with its use; if only to help train their young sons. Figure 21 and 22 show *Samurai* women training with swords. These prints are a collection of eight by the Artist Katsugawa Shunsho, published in 1775.



The development of clog-like sandals with two large prong-like protrusions emanating from each sole were probably designed to aid the *Samurai's* foot holding during combat, but became a standard fashion of both men and women. Examples of these sandals can be seen in figures 6 and 15.

It is logical to accept that the sword and the way it was used had a very powerful effect on the design of armour in medieval Japan. However when one considers the needs of the *Samurai* to be able to move, using the sword with complete freedom at any given moment it begins to seem all the more plausible that the sword might have played a significant part in shaping *Samurai* dress. The sword itself was and is also a part of the traditional costume and this alone shows how strongly the sword is associated with the history of Japan. Its influence in this area can be seen in the traditional theatre forms of Japan. This area of influence will be dealt with in the next chapter.

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## CHAPTER FOUR:

### THE SWORD'S SIGNIFICANCE IN TRADITIONAL JAPANESE THEATRE.

The traditional theatre forms of Japan still command a strong following today. All these theatre forms deal with legends and stories surrounding the adventures of the *Samurai*. Through its association with these warriors the sword has exerted a very noticeable influence upon these productions.

There are three main forms of traditional Japanese theatre, *Kabuki* - drama dealing with the traditional *Samurai* period; *Noh* - a mime-like masked period drama, and *Bunraku* - a puppet production dealing with *Samurai* period subjects.

#### The Sword in Kabuki.

Within all these forms of theatre stories of the *Samurai* are predominant. Within *Kabuki* all forms of the performance are highly stylised. Expression, speech and movement are all exaggerated. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this form of theatre, along with all the others, contains period costumes which themselves have been influenced by the sword. All the male actors playing *Samurai* appear wearing the two swords and perhaps the most obvious influence of the sword upon *Kabuki* and the other theatre forms is its use on stage. Sword fights take place frequently on stage but are more violent excitement than active combat. *Masakatsu Guni* states in his book *Kabuki*, that "The sword fights that frequently occur in *Kabuki*, despite their apparent blood thirstiness ... are intended to suggest all kinds of customs and natural phenomena." (*Masakatsu*, 1985, p. 17) This quote perhaps demonstrates more than any incident that the sword is still seen as a mystical object by the Japanese. Not only do sword fights occur in *Kabuki* but the sword itself is seen as a powerful entity that can be symbolic of status or forces such as those of destruction that occur in nature.





Left: A samurai wearing armor typical of the early Muromachi Period. He carries a nodachi, the extra-long sword.

FIGURE 23: Nodachi, Or Extra Long Sword.



The second most obvious influence of the sword upon *Kabuki* is the stylised way in which the actors move. It is obvious to those who have trained in the martial arts that the actors movements constantly mimic those used in the martial arts even when not depicting fighting. As already mentioned the sword has helped shape and form the martial art in Japan, and thus effects the movements of *Kabuki*. This theory can be supported by examining the terminology of both the martial arts and *Kabuki*. Masakatsu states; "*Kabuki* is characterised by certain styles of acting known as *Kata*." (Masakatsu, 1985, p. 17) Reid states that in the martial arts, training is divided into "Rigid sequences of movements known as *Kata*." He also states that these *Kata* are most commonly applicable to the sword fighting arts. (Reid, 1983, p. 126).

#### Bunraku, Noh and The Sword.

These same *Kata* can also be found in *Bunraku*. In his book, Bunraku, Keene states that this form of theatre is stylised by "*Kata*, spectacular poses." He also states that "One cannot be sure of the successive stages undergone in the formation of these gestures". (Keene, 1965, p. 64/65) However it would appear that the use of the word *Kata* along with the fact that many sword-play stances are flamboyant is enough to verify the strong possibility of the sword arts having an influence upon the movements of *Bunraku*.

In the puppet theatre of *Bunraku* all figures appear half of life size. Everything is to scale except the words which appear actual size. In *Kabuki* and *Noh* the sword often appear as an *Nodachi*, or extra long swords. Figure 23 is a print depicting a *Samurai* wearing armour typical of the early *Muromachi* Period. This *Samurai* is seen carrying a *Nodachi*, This example clearly demonstrates just how large this exaggerated sword was. This difference in scale compared to the actors and puppets may indicate that the sword is of greater in importance to the drama than any









FIGURE 24: Charatures From Tradional Theatre.



other prop. Perhaps it even suggests that the swords and their masters are the most powerful forces at work within these dramas.

When the traditional theatre forms of the Japanese are viewed with a knowledge of the martial arts and the acceptance of the sword's possible effects on traditional dress it does not seem hard to believe the sword has effected these dramas. From costume to action scenes, from symbolism to movement, it can be argued that the sword has exerted an influence. Photographic examples of these theatre forms can be seen in Figure 24. The actors of these theatre forms are often the subjects of Japanese prints and the swords that accompany them also appear in the subject matter. I will deal with the sword's significance in Japanese prints in the next section of this thesis.

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## CHAPTER FIVE:

### THE SWORD'S SIGNIFICANCE IN JAPANESE PRINTS.

The sword, the *Samurai*, and battles depicting both are the subject matter of innumerable Japanese prints, many examples of such prints have been used in previous chapters. The way these prints portray the sword gives valuable insight into the way the blade was regarded by the artist. It would be futile to try and examine the sword's significance within the total range of subject matter available within this area. Therefore I have chosen to limit my examination of this sector to a few of the more dramatic examples of where the sword features in prints.

The first image used in this thesis ( fig 1) is a woodblock print depicts *Wakiya Yoshisuke*, the brother of *Nitayoshisada*, a life-long supporter of the legitimate line of emperors. The print depicts the slaying of one warrior by *Wakiya* using a *Katana*.

This print tells us numerous things about the sword. Firstly and most obviously it demonstrates the cutting power of the Japanese sword, as the sword cuts through the steel helmet. It also confirms that the sword was used in this overhead downward striking fashion mentioned earlier.

The armour of *Wakiya* can be seen in its loose nature allowing the *Samurai* to move freely. Also arrows appear to have penetrated the tile formation, supporting arguments relating to armour design presented earlier. *Wakiya* was a warrior who lived in the 14th century. This print dates from the 17th century, showing the exploits of a warrior and his sword were capable of capturing the Japanese imagination long after their adventures had taken place.





FIGURE 27: " Prince Yamoto And The Grass- Mowing Sword".





FIGURE 26: "Iguchi Jirō Fighting With An Ogre Serpent".



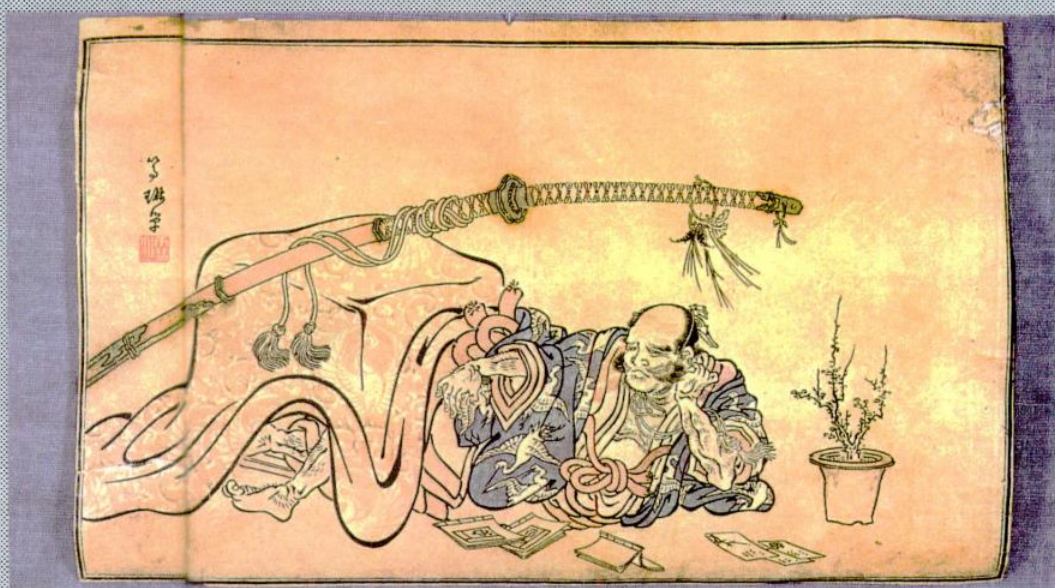


FIGURE 25: "The Hero Asahina saburō".







The second print which I wish to examine can be seen in Figure 25. This print entitled "The Hero *Asahina Saburo* " by the artist *Torin-gaku* depicts a warrior in contemplation of philosophical texts. It does not represent the usual fierce warrior type, but a cultivated poet. This print dates from around the middle of the 18th century and confirms that during the *Tokugawa* period the sword became less important as a weapon and more important as a symbolic artifact. In fact, an exaggerated drawing of a sword predominates the entire image. This perhaps suggests that this *Samurai's* status as connoisseur of poetry is a direct result of his aesthetic appreciation of the sword. The sword appears to be of the *Nodachi* type often seen in the *Kabuki* theatre. This is probably because the sword contains strong symbolic significance within this print as within the theatre.

The third print I will deal with in this section (fig 26) is entitled "*Iguch Jiro* Fighting With an Ogre Serpent" by *Shuntei*. It probably dates from somewhere around 1815 to 1920. The artist was deeply influenced by the sword and his works, as Hajex states often contained " ...bloodshed, theme of war and fierce battle." (Hajex, 1982, p. 98) Within this print the sword is depicted as the sole force preventing the *Samurai* from being destroyed by what almost appears to be an unstoppable force of nature. This again reinforces the sword's symbolic power, placing it on a level with natural forces often experienced in Japanese theatre.

Another example of the sword's legendary ability to defy nature can be seen in the fourth print in this section. (fig 27). In this print entitled "Prince *Yamato* and the Grass Mowing Sword", (Turnbull, 1982, p. 11) the flamboyant warrior can be seen releasing the sword as if to let it cut the fields of cane around him of its own accord. Turnbull states that; "According to legend, *Yamato*, the heroic son of Emperor *Eiko* was surrounded by enemies who set fire to the long grass." Prince *Yamato* escaped by cutting his way through this grass with his sword. (Turnbull, 1982, p. 10). This print supports the esoteric connection between the royal family and the sword. The sword









FIGURE 30: "The Satsuma Rebellion".









FIGURE 29: " Kwaidi Hyaku Senso".



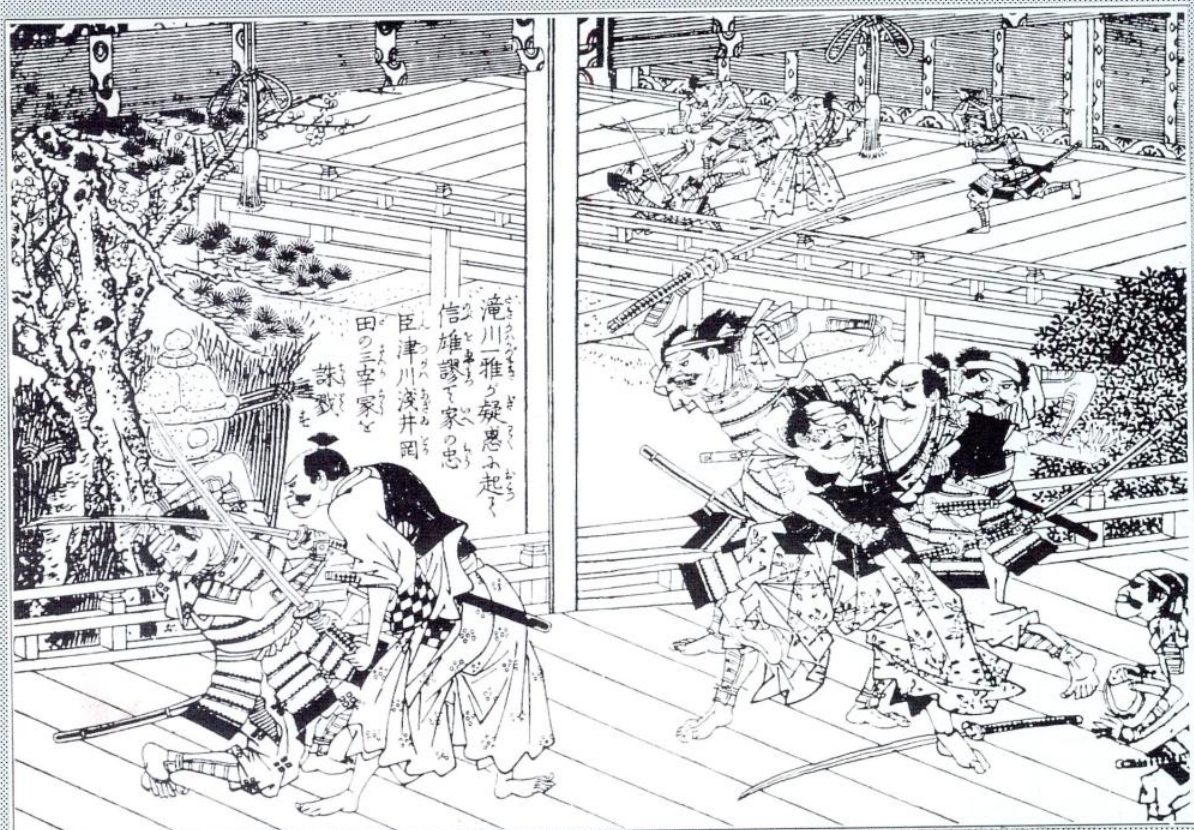
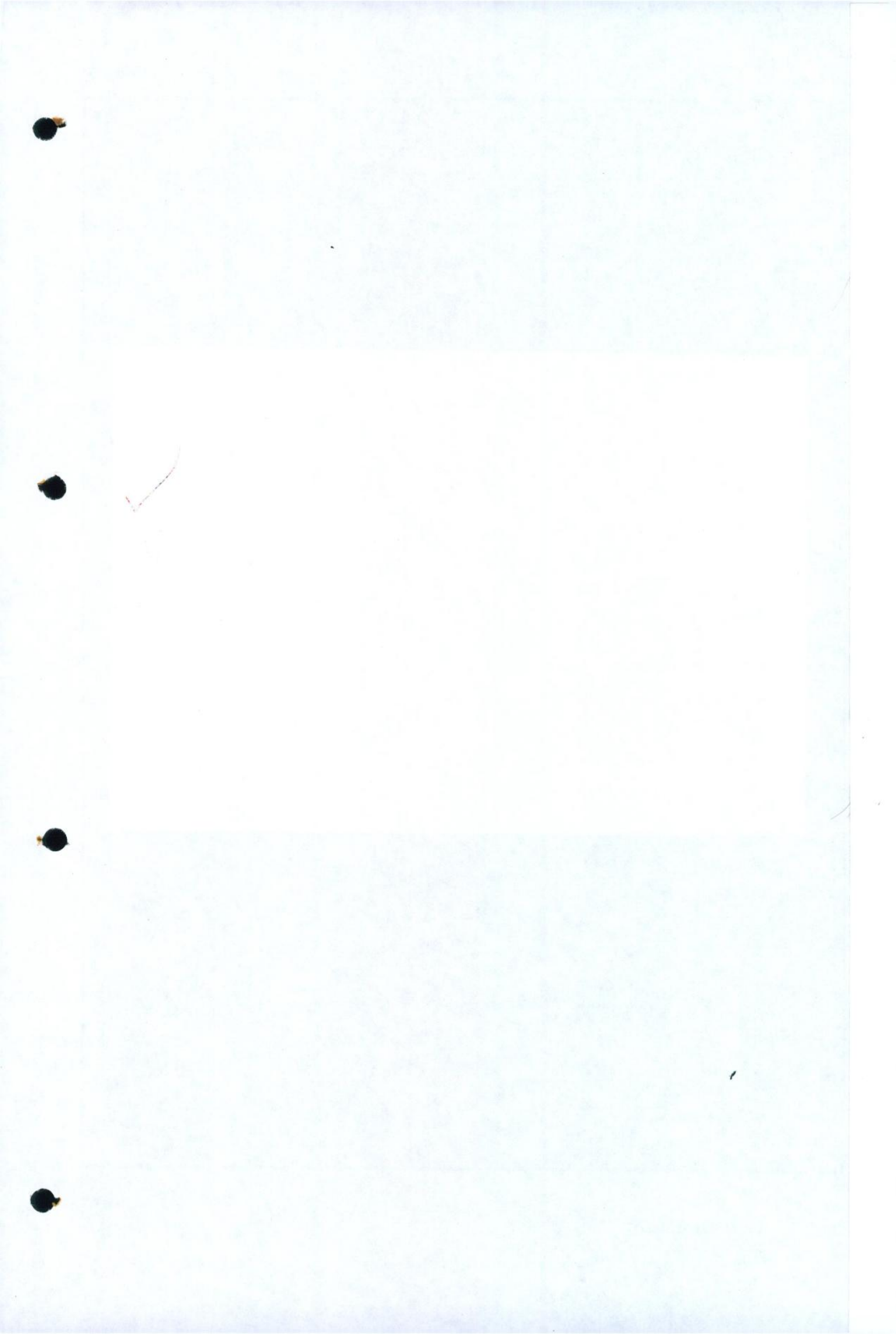


FIGURE 28: "Oda Nobuo".







allows the prince to defy the forces of nature and the blade seems to move of its own accord.

Sword battles are often portrayed in Japanese prints, and they demonstrate the individual nature of combat in Feudal Japan, favouring one to one battles with swords as the decisive form of combat. An example the print entitled "*Oda Nobuo*", which depicts a battle for a castle keep, published between 1857 and 1884 (fig 28). Another more interesting example of the sword's use in battle can be seen in Figs 29/30.

Figure 29 depicts a print of a lone *Samurai*, sword in hand, facing modern weapons with defiance. Figure 30 shows a 19th century Japanese army engaged in battle using *Katanas* against a range of modern weapons. Both these 19th century prints depict the *Satsuma* rebellion. Turnbull states that this rebellion took place in 1876 when due to foreign pressures the then government banned the wearing of swords in public. Thus the *Samurai* were denied the symbol of their existence. As a result 7,000 *Samurai* students attacked government troops and naval forces. During this battle the students refused to use modern firearms which led to their downfall. (Turnbull, 1982, p.80-87) However this sacrifice suggests just how precious the sword still was to the Japanese Nobles, even at the end of the 19th century in a world of firearms.

These prints bring me to the subject of the end of the sword's existence as a badge of the *Samurai* in Japan. The last century of *Tokugawa* rule was a time of crises for the *Samurai*. On the 8th of July 1853, after many disputes with the United States of America over the 200 year trade ban, a squadron of four ships commanded by Admiral Perry entered *Endo* (*Tokyo* as it is now known) harbour and lay siege to the city threatening to fire on it with the frigates' cannons. Perry demanded that the Shogunate submit to foreign demands to open the country up to trade. From here on in, because of interference and pressure from the outside world,



the Shogunate was forced to relinquish power to a government made up mainly of the lower classes, and according to Turnbull, in 1876 sword wearing was abolished.(Turnbull, 1982, p. 183) But the aforementioned prints of the student rebellion demonstrated how the *Samurai* sought to keep the spirit of the sword-wielding warrior alive. And it is through romantic prints such as this that the image of the *Samurai* as a noble warrior is preserved to this day.

The creative arts of Japan, such as the prints mentioned here, have helped to establish the sword and the *Samurai* as symbols of nobility and virtue. I will discuss some of the effects of the sword's image as a noble weapon in my next chapter.

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FIGURE 31: Comic Book Covers, Note Sword.







## CHAPTER SIX:

### TWENTIETH CENTURY JAPAN AND THE SWORD.

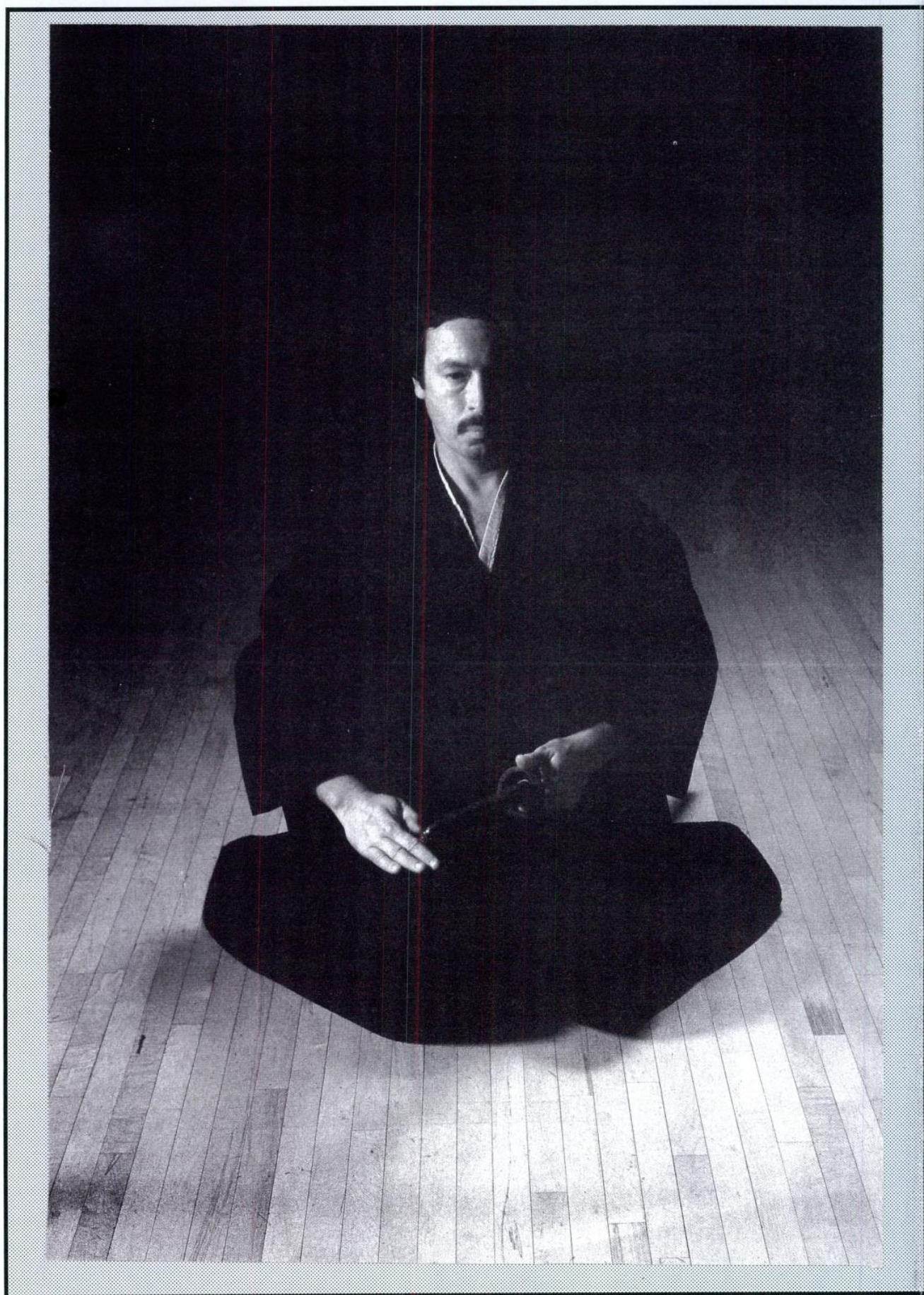
#### The Sword in Pulp Fiction.

It can be argued that although the Samurai are gone, the influences of the sword in present day Japan are practically innumerable. The sword features in countless video games such as Nintendo's "Sword of the Samurai" and comic books such as Lone Wolf & Cub, or Kozure Okami, as it is known in Japanese, and Crying Freeman, both of which feature *Samurai*-like heroes. Figure 31 depicts two covers from Japanese comic books, note how the sword features prominently. Figure 32 gives an accurate portrayal of their content, again note the sword. This pulp fiction to Western thinking might appear to be the domain of young boys. While these forms of entertainment do introduce the younger generation to the sword these comic reach a far larger audience of adults. The cultural information pack distributed by the Japanese Embassy (Ireland) states, "Comic books are immensely popular in Japan, and a large number of weeklies are published for adults as well as children. One of them reportedly has a circulation of over 4 million copies a week." ( The Japan of Today, 1993, p.126)

#### The Sword in 20th Century Literature & Cinema.

The sword has also influenced more serious Japanese literature in the 20th century. One of Japan's most prolific and best loved writers *Eiji Yoshikawa* (1892/1962) wrote a series of books about the afore mentioned sword saint Musashi. These books are concerned with the study of manhood and the attainment of virtue through pursuit of the way of the sword. This literature, it can be argued, inspired other works of modern drama which deal with the same subjects such as the film The Seven Samurai and Ran by the world famous Japanese producer *Kurosawa*.





*FIGURE 34: Yakuza Warrior, Note The Absence Of Righth Fore Finger.*





*FIGURE 33: Yakuza In full Body Tatto, Posing With Sword In The Tokyo Night.*



This literature and cinematography has re-awakened the image of the *Samurai* as a noble warrior. But movies such as The Seven Samurai also portray the *Samurai* as a Robin Hood like figure prepared to help those lessor than himself. History shows this to be blatantly untrue, but this myth has been adopted and propagated by the *Yakuza* or Japanese Mafia. These gangsters base themselves upon the *Samurai* of old, mimicking their ceremonies. Through this association with the *Samurai*, they have succeeded in gaining credibility in the public mind and thus the police find it very hard to prosecute such characters. The *Yakuza* can operate with such impunity that they maintain public offices and openly display the nature of the "business" on entrance plaques.

These *Yakuza* often tattoo their bodies with images of sword fighting warriors, are often seen brandishing swords, and all members practice the sword arts. Figure 33 shows a *Yakuza* displaying his body tattoos and *Katana*. As punishments, Dubro in his book The Yakuza, notes that as a substitute for ritual suicide a *Yakuza* must sever a finger with a sword blade. (Dubro, 1987, p.29/33). This serves more than mere humiliation, the mutilation weakens the sword hand. It is conceivable that if such a criminal was to make enough blunders he would be unable to hold a sword and stigmatised as unfit to be a member of the group, who see themselves as latter day *Samurai*. Figure 34 depicts a modern *kenjitsu* warrior, note the absence of his right fore finger.

### Connoisseurs of The Sword.

Other rituals revolving around the sword the are still practiced by law abiding citizens to this day .Reid describes practices identical to those described by *Kapp* (see Ch. 1) concerning sword viewing and handling which are strict rules upheld by connoisseurs handling swords in modern Japan .(Reid,1983, p. 118/123) This indicates that rituals connected to the sword still exert influence on modern Japanese society.



### The Sword in Business.

It is arguable the sword has also appeared as a pivotal force in the Japanese business world. Here its most significant effects in the 20th century can be found. The Sword is often used to market products, for example the 1993 Tokyo Road Show witnessed the launch of Yamaha's "Katana 90zx" road bike. It is interesting to note that the motor bike is not on sale outside Japan, perhaps the Yamaha corporation, with a name like "*Katana*", was aiming the bike purely at the Japanese market.

The most dramatic influence of the sword is its reported effect on business practice. The Book of Five Rings, the philosophical and tactical study of the art of sword combat by Musashi discussed in chapter 2, has impacted heavily on the business world. Within the text the author compares the strategy of sword fencing to the skills of the craftsman and businessman alike. (Musashi, 1974, p.23/40) Because of this The Book of Five Rings has become recognised as a work that not only applies to military strategy, but to any situation where plans and tactics are used. It has been noted by the translator Harris that "The Japanese businessman has used Go Rin No Sho as a guide for business practice, making sale campaigns like military operations, using the same energetic methods." (Harris, 1974, p. 20)

Time Out magazine has been quoted as saying that the success of Japanese business; "...lies not in more robots on the factory floor or company singsongs at 9 am. It lies in a Book of Five Rings." (Time Out, Vol, 12 1986) So it would seem that through its influences on Japanese philosophy the sword has shaped Japanese business practice.

Not only the Japanese view their success as being affected by the strategy of the sword. Western businessmen are also turning these combat techniques into strategies in boardroom debates. Time Magazine states; "On Wall Street when Musashi talks, people listen." (Time, Vol 2, 1982). The Book of Five Rings was









FIGURE 36: Kamakazai Pilot Holding Sword.





この陸軍大尉大礼服一式は、軍装品販売業、浅草  
ふきや商店より、資料を提供していただきました。

FIGURE 35: WWII Japanese Naval Officer Sporting Katana.



inspired solely by sword fencing thus it can be said the sword, through this text, has influenced Japanese business tactics.

Within the business world the sword itself is seen as an investment opportunity. Reid cites an example of this when stating; "*Yoshihara San*, a renowned swordsmith working in modern *Tokyo*, commands a high price for his blades which are considered '...a. good investment.... many are never trained with or viewed publicly, but are placed straight from forge to bank vaults....' *Yoshihara San* himself is considered to be a national treasure and is supported by the government. (Reid, 1983, p.104/105) This indicates that today, just as in Tokugawa's time, the sword is more important in conveying wealth and status than as a weapon or work of art.

#### Rank & Nobility in The 20th Century.

The sword's connection to status was not confined to modern business in the 20th century Japan. The sword's association with status and rank ritual affected Japanese society long after the *Samurai* were gone. Military officers during World War II were issued with *Katana* which could serve little function as weapons in the face of modern artillery. While they may have seen some use in battle their main purpose was in denoting rank. Figure 35 depicts a Japanese naval officer in full ceremonial dress, sporting a *Katana*. *Kamakazai* pilots were ceremonially issued with *Katana*. These swords remained with their families and were not taken into battle. (fig 36)

I believe that the sword has had as much effect on the modern Japanese as it has had on their medieval ancestors, though in a cerebral as apposed to a physical way. The *Katana* is still an icon of power coveted by the wealthy, a source inspiration for writers and artists. It has a hold of the old and young's imaginations



alike; is the image used by marketing, whether selling motor bikes or legitimising organised crime. The arts of swordplay shape and promote Japanese business success.

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## CONCLUSION.

As I hope this thesis has shown, there is a strong possibility that the Japanese sword, the *Katana*, has had an affect upon both the art and culture of Japan. I believe that the evidence I have presented in the six chapters of this thesis support this theory. In summation I believe this evidence indicates that the *Katana* affected Japanese society in the following ways:

During Japan's Medieval past the sword would seem to have secured the *Samurai's* claim to power, enabling them to effectively dominate the civilian population. The main reasons for this influence was most likely the *Katana's* excellent capabilities as a weapon and the ban restricting the possession of these blades by non -*Samurai*.

As a result of the *Samurai's* high status, the sword that was exclusively theirs became a symbol of power. This association between the blade and rank seems to still be evident in Japan's culture today. From gangsters to businessmen, all take pride in owning high class blades. The sword seems to have affected business on a strategical level too. The strategies of swordplay, as layed out in The Book Of Five Rings, are applied to boardroom debates.

Religion evolved alongside the blade, often using the *Katana* as a symbol of power. *Zen* in particularly may owe its existence to the practice of swordplay as a form of self defence.

The garments of the *Samurai* seem to have been designed to accommodate their need to move freely in sword combat. These clothes became the national costume and the standard garb used in Japan's traditional theatre. Many art forms feature the *Katana* prominently in their subject matter, from sculpture to prints. Prints in particular exploit the sword as an icon of nobility and power.



Fear of foreign firearms, and its impact on the sword , arguably led to the Samurai cutting themselves, and Japan, off from the rest of the world for over 200 years.

Perhaps as a result of this isolation, many aspects of modern Japanese life the sword seems to still serve as inspiration. Many novels and films have taken up the baton from the traditional theatre forms and use the sword as a pivotal element.

The sword's influence is not simply confined to the areas I have discussed in detail here. Its affects often appear in isolated and unrelated aspect of Japanese culture. Such influences of the sword do not fit neatly into any of the sections I have previously discussed. and to tackle them all would require a considerably larger work than this thesis. However it is my hope that the arguments I have presented suggest that the sword has affected Japanese society from its highest to lowest levels both past and present. I believe that the *Katana* has affected the country culturally, philosophically, as a status symbol, and physically as a means of enforcing power. I also believe that to the present day the blade is strongly engendered in the collective subconscious of Japan, from the respectable business world to the illicit dealings of the underworld.

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## APPENDICES.

### Glossary & Pronunciation:

Aiejitsu: A-ee-jit-sah, "quick draw", art of drawing the sword quickly from the scabbard.

Aimi Shimo: A-ee-mee-shee-mah, 15th cent. shirt.

Akido: A-kee-doh, "way of harmony" wrestling art.

Asashina; A-see-shee-nah, 15th cent. provincial lord, see Diamyo.

Bunraku: Bhun-rah-cuh, traditional puppet theatre.

Diamyo: Die-mee-yoh, provincial lord.

Endo: En-doh, 15th cent name for Tokyo.

Go Rin No Sho: Goh Rinne Now Show, "A Book Of Five Rings".

Hakama: Hah- kah- mah, split skirt.

Hideyoshi: see Toyotomi Hideyoshi.

Ieyasu: see Tokugawa Ieyasu.

Iguch Jiro: Ee-guh Jee-roh, 15th cent hero.

Jikou-ten: Jee-koh-kuh-ten, 18th cent Shinto god.

Jujitsu: Jew-jih-dsu, wrestling art.

Kabuki: Kah-buh-kee, stylised traditional theatre.

Kamakazai: Kam-mee-kaz-ee, "divine wind" name given to suicide pilots in WW2; named after legendary storm.

Kapp: Cap, modern Japanese swordsmith.

Karate: Kah-rah-tay, "empty hand", unarmed martial art.

Katana: Kah-tah-nah, long sword.

Kendo: Ken-doh, "way of the sword", fencing art.

Kazukui Shotu: Kah-zuh-kuee Show-too, 15 cent print maker.

Kensai: Ken-sigh, Ken meaning sword, sai meaning saint, ie sword saint.







Kimono: Kim-oh-noh, traditional Japanese garb.

Kote : Koh-tay, armed guard or cloth glove.

Musashi Miamoto: Moo-sah-shee Mee-ah-moh-toh, 15th cent swordsmen.

Nobunaga: Noh-buh- nah-gah; 15th cent Daimyo.

Nodachi: Noh-dah-shee, extra long sword.

Noh: Noh , Traditional Masked Mime.

Obi: Oh-bee, belt worn with kimono.

Okinawa: Oh-kee-now-ah, Japanese colony and birthplace of Karate.

Sai: Sigh, Okinawan sword weapon.

Shogun: Show-gun, "retainer" all powerful usurper of the emperors, see Tokugawa.

Tokugawa Ieyasu: Toh-guh-gah-wah, Eee-yah-sue, first Shogun of Japan.

Tachi: Tah-chee, term often used in place of Katana.

Tanto: Tan-toh, dagger.

Toyotomi Hidenobu: Toh-yoh-toh-mee Hee-dee-yoh-see, predecessor of first Shogun.

Tsuba: Dsuh-bah, sword guard.

Wakizashi: Wok-ee-zah-shee, "companion sword".

Yamabushi: Yah-mah-buh-shee, 15th cent warrior monk.

Yoshimoto :Yoh-shee-moh-toh, 15th cent Daimyo.

Zen: Zhen, form of Buddhism adopted by Samurai..



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