

SAMURAI DAYORI

Recently I received some papers from Ohashi Kenshin sensei for all of students and anyone who are interested in Japanese swords and martial arts. I am going to introduce them on this newsletter every month from this issue. Most of them are long and I need to divide for some months. But a few that I think it is better to read all at once is going to be on one newsletter. Please read carefully. These are great things to know and you should know if you are learning Kenjutsu and Iai.

WHY DO JAPANESE SWORDS CUT WELL?

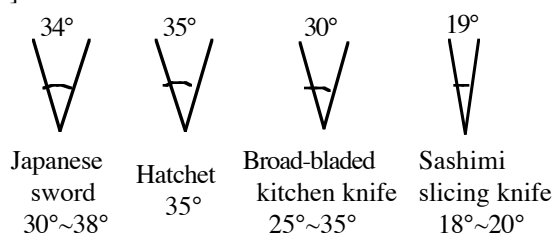
Before I talk about Japanese swords, let me explain “what edged tools are” and “what cutting is”.

If you keep pressing a stick onto some object, that stick gets into the object by degrees. Then the stick breaks through the object when the pressing power become stronger than the power of object pushing back. This is ‘cutting’. But an extremely strong power is required to cut the object like flesh with a cylinder shape stick. The power needs to concentrate on one point to cut with the smaller strength.

If the part of stick that touches the object is thin and sharp, the point of contact becomes smaller and the power can concentrate to that point. The stick can cut the object with smaller power. This is ‘*ha* (blade)’. If the edge of blade is thinner, it is easier to cut.

Also, there is another factor of ‘cut well’. That is ‘*hakaku*(an angle of the edge)’.

[#1]



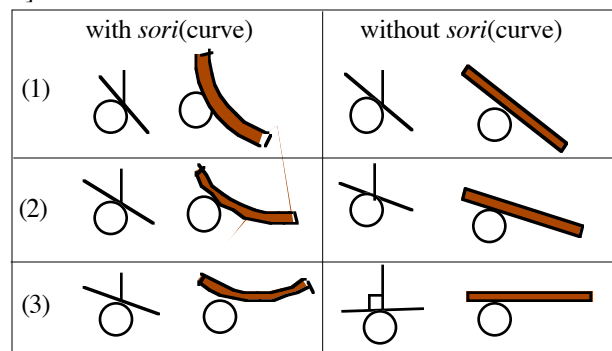
After the edge cuts the surface of the object, the other part of sword following the edge starts getting into the object. If the angle of the edge is sharper, it can cut easier with less resistance of the object. However, if the blade can cut better when it is thinner and sharper, but, the durability of the blade become weaker.

A way to solve this problem is to use ‘principle of an oblique line’. The blade can cut better when it has some angle to the object than the perpendicular.

In this way it is the same reason that a guillotine’s blade was set with some angle to a human neck.

Then, how should we cut with the blade in our hand?

[#2]



There is a way that the blade is added ‘*sori* (a curve)’. If you use the straight blade, at first when the edge touches the surface of an object with some angle, then the blade is going to be vertical while cutting down. But if the blade has a curve, it keeps the angle to the object and doesn’t lose the ability of cutting until the end. Also you need to do ‘*oshi kiri* (cut with pushing)’ and ‘*hiki kiri* (cut with pulling)’. The blade can’t cut the object with just touching surface. It need to be pushed or pulled. This is another ‘principle of an oblique line’.

Now, we go back to Japanese swords.

Most people have an image that Japanese sword is extremely sharp and if you touch the edge of blade even slightly, you get cut. But as you can see from the drawing[#1], the angle of a Japanese sword is 30~38 degrees, and around 35 degrees is most common. This is same as a hatchet and unexpectedly thicker than most people think. You don’t cut yourself by just touching it.

When a master of *Kenjutsu* or *Iai* swings the sword, the speed of *monouchi* of the blade became 25m/sec, 84 ft/sec (90 kmh, 57 mp). If the sword hits the human body with this speed, the impact weight is about 500 kg(1100lbs). In other words, you can cut arms easily without sharp edge(‘*ha*’). If you use the sword with ‘*sori*’ and ‘*ha*’ and cut with pulling, you can cut very easily and cleanly with a little obtuse angle edge of blade.

In this connection I may add that the Japanese letter of ‘cut’ 斬 shows the mean that swing 斤(an ax/ a hatchet) like 車(a wheel).

True Japanese swords have directly-opposed qualities as ‘no break’ but ‘no bend’. When it meet those conditions, they can be Japanese swords. There aren’t enough words to show respect to Japanese swordsmiths who fused two opposite requirements and created Japanese swords not only as a weapon, also as a unique art work that you can’t find in other countries.

Let me talk about the way of ‘tanren(forge)’ quickly.[#3]

**Kabutobuse*--wrap a soft core steel(*shingane*) with a hard steel (*kawagane* (*kawa* means skin)) like a crepe.

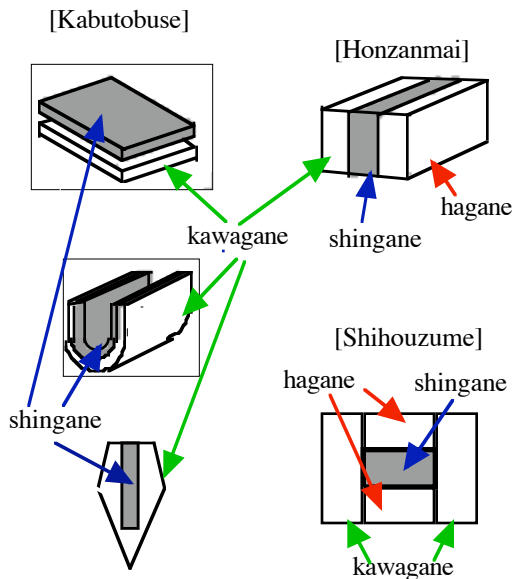
**Honzanmai* ---put together *shingane*, *kawagane* and *ha-gane*

Shihouzume*--- a hard steel(*kawagane*) for *ha* and *mine, a little softer steel(*kawagane*) for both sides of blade and a soft core steel(*shingane*) for center. **mine* is also called *mune*.

**Mukukitae*---no soft steel(*shingane*)

There are 3 standard ways as stated above except *Mukukitae*. *Shihou zume* is the best in those three.

[#3]



A demand of *Guntou*(military swords) increased when Japan entered into *Shouwa*(1925~1988) era. Swords which were called ‘spring *tou*’ or ‘*nobe*(sheet) *katana*’ were made for this purpose. These were cut out swords from steel sheets. They can not be called Japanese swords but they can cut well and are durable. I use one for my students’ training in my Dojo.

Japanese swords are made with a fully worked-out way on limited materials to have directly-opposed characteristics as ‘sharp and cut well’ but ‘strength of no bend or break’. Also the unique technique of forging with folding steel and tempering create beautiful patterns on the blade, and it reaches to the level of great art works. These are technologies we can be proud of to the world.

We must treat our swords with best care and respect as martial artists.

*Mukushin-ryu kobujutsu**
15 daime(15th) souke OhashiKenshin

**kobujutsu*- old traditional style bujutsu

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

The Craft of the Japanese Sword

---by Leon and Hiroko Kapp, Yoshindo Yoshihara

This book explains each process of making Japanese swords with many photographs. You can learn not only about making blade, but also all parts of the sword and the work of swordsmith and other people who makes every single part of the sword. Also you can learn about check points to exam the sword, too.

INTERESTING FACTS

The blade of swords in Japanese movies are bamboo. It is covered by aluminum foil to make it looks real.

The bamboo sword is called ‘*takemitsu*’. *Takemitsu* is the sword that only blade part is bamboo. It is not *shinai*. Samurai who didn’t have enough money to by real swords wore them often to dress as a samurai.

EVERYDAY JAPANESE

Face(kao)	action(dousa)
forehead - hitai	move - ugoku
eye - me	movement - ugoki
nose - hana	stand (up) - tatsu
mouth - kuchi	sit (down) - suwaru
ear - mimi	walk - aruku
chin - ago	run - hashiru
cheek - ho o	stop - tomaru/tomeru/yameru

If you wish to have a copy of Ohashi sensei’s part only, please feel free to ask me at Dojo or send me an email. I will provide as soon as possible.

In this newsletter:

Japanese names are written by Japanese way. Family name comes first, then given name.

Japanese words are written close to Japanese pronunciations and writing,ie. Noutou instead of Noto or Shougun instead of Shogun.

Have a questions or request? Contact me at:
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