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## The History of Japanese Kendo (Fencing) (III)

*By Kunikichi Kaneko\**

As for the introduction of swordsmanship from the Continent, some believe that the art brought in from the Continent probably paved the way for the development of Japanese Kendo (fencing) just as *kenpō* (a Chinese-originated system of self-defense without a weapon) is said to have been introduced from the Continent to form the foundation of other military arts. The Chinese History Book "Shih-chi" written in 97 B. C. contains such stories as "The Art of Stabbing with a Sword," "Chivalrous Fencers," and "Lives of Assassins," clearly showing that there existed swordsmanship in the country. Unlike China, Japan, which had no letters and introduced them in later years, has many old documents on swords alone, which formed implements for the theocratic government which was carried on for political reasons and nothing could be left on swordsmanship which is the art of using a sword. There are some documents suggesting that the art was introduced from China, but I cannot believe that Japanese Kendo (fencing) was introduced from the Continent when I think of the changes in Japanese swords as well as of the fact that some Chinese writers admire the Japanese consummate way of wielding a sword.

About the time of the Taika Reforms (645 A. D.) communications between Japan and the Continent were most developed and this period is called the period of the introduction of Continental culture because Continental culture and institutions were actively introduced and imitated. Swordsmanship was also influenced by this trend: the one inherited from olden times declined and was overshadowed by the other which was devised after Chinese art of fencing. The then social backgrounds, however, did not necessitate the further promotion of swordsmanship of imitation, nor of ancient swordsmanship.

With the introduction of Chinese institutions, swordsmanship which had developed in a way peculiar to Japan was influenced by the superficial imitation of shapes of its Chinese counterpart. There was also a social tendency toward making much of civil affairs and

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making little of military affairs, leading to the issuance in the Taika era of the order to forbid a sword to be carried with one. Thus swordsmanship in Japan went on declining. Swordsmanship introduced from China indeed overwhelmed the art of fencing peculiar to Japan, but it was rather superficial, and as social conditions changed, the latter began to grow again and there appeared some changes in the way of making swords.

A social factor which necessitated the rise of swordsmanship was incessant war disturbances caused by confusion in politics and disorder in institutions following the period of the introduction and imitation of Continental culture. Such factors as the rise of the *samurai* class brought about this social unrest, changes in the way of fighting and various experiences obtained from repeated actual battles paved the way for the prosperity of fencing. The following factors must also be mentioned.

1. Weakened central government.
2. Rise of powerful local clans (*samurai* class).
3. Invasion of Mongolia.
4. Establishment of military government.

These factors combined to bring about changes in the way of fighting and the way of making swords. The olden way of fighting by means of bows and arrows were gradually replaced by a more direct way by close order, spears and on horseback, so that the uses of swords necessarily progressed, were improved and prospered under the protection and encouragement of military commanders.

As for the prosperity of swordsmanship, this art, which was in decay at the beginning and middle of the Heian Period, began to show signs of revival toward the end of the period. In the then society there appeared various factors which necessitated such a tendency. Introduced Chinese culture was at last on the decline, and in the field of literature the prosperity and popularization of Japanese literature was promoted, leading to the period of the prosperity of Japanese literature. In many of the works of writers at this time we can find records on swordsmanship and the way of fighting. Besides, when we think of the changes in Japanese swords, we at once become aware of the following facts. In olden times most of Japanese swords were made by Continental or naturalized people and those made by Japanese swordsmiths were only their imitations. Toward the end of the Heian Period, when swordsmanship was in decay, Japanese swords began to change their shape from the former straight shape to a curved shape as a result of experiences of repeated actual battles. Unique form of swords with such characteristics as 1. curved form, 2. the ridges on the sides of a sword blade, and 3. maker's

signature on the right side of a sword blade were born. These changes in the making of swords show how skillful and frequent the uses of swords became and how widely they were taught, as well as the fact that there appeared many swordsmiths. In connection with the last fact we notice the following items :

1. Swords were in great demand.
2. Military commanders protected and encouraged sword-making.
3. By making them in great numbers, swords became cheaper and easier to get.
4. They are convenient for carrying and self-defense.

In this way swords came to be used increasingly widely and popularized.

What was the actual conditions of swordsmanship which became thus prosperous? and how the art was taught? In many of works at that time we can learn that each of the ways of wielding a sword has its name, such as Kumode, Kakunawa, Jumonji, Tonbogaeri, Mizuguruma and many others. The names of particular persons were also mentioned and their excellent swordsmanship was admired. Thus swordsmanship in Japan began to grow again at the end of the Heian Period and kept on developing under military commanders' protection and encouragement in the Kamakura Period. Since the Nanbokuchō Period the art, bringing about the development and changes of swords through experiences of war disturbances, has prospered more and more and been taught increasingly widely.