

## THE SWORD BRINGS TWO CULTURES TOGETHER AGAIN AFTER 800 YEARS

By Sekiguchi Kenshi ( a.k.a. Robert W. Montgomery)

A light breeze carried from the outside the sounds of birds and rustling leaves along with a bolt of sunlight that stabbed in to the cool darkness of the interior. A splash of sunlight bounced off of the descending blade that whistled as it cut through the air in a large circle from over head of the Japanese warrior. The reflected sunlight lit the faces of the two Hawaiian warriors standing just inside the darkness. The esteem Hawaiian warrior's faces only hinted at the mixture of strong spiritual emotions that rose and surged through their bodies. This could have been the scene from the 13<sup>th</sup> century Hawaiian Legend "Iron Knife" when Hawaiian warriors first witnessed a ship wrecked Japanese Sea Captain's katana. It was not this legendary scene from long ago, but a scene from only yesterday here in Wailuku, Maui.

The "Iron Knife" legend is part of Hawaiian oral history about the first of several unsuccessful attempts by ambitious war-like chiefs to unite the island group under one government. King Kamehameha (reign 1810 -1819) finally achieved unity. This legend is recorded by the Hawaiian King David Kalakaua (reigned 1874 – 1891) in his book <sup>f</sup>"The Legends and Myths of Hawaii" that he printed in 1888. His writings were an attempt to establish a legitimate national literature in a time of resurgent of Hawaiian nationalism. This legend tells about events during this first attempt to establish one rule by the bold warrior king of the island of Hawaii, Kalaunuiohua in A.D. 1260. The participants in this story were all rulers of islands in the group, representatives of sovereign families and are very prominent in other legends that provide the historical content for this story. This legend is about a Japanese Sea Captain's "*long bright sword*" that becomes the ransom for the Hawaiian king who was the first to try to unite the island.

The sword came to Wailuku, Maui with the arrival of a ship wrecked Japanese Sea Captain. Up until this time iron and other metals were unknown to the Hawaiians. The Japanese Sea Captain became a Wailuku warrior under king Kamaluohua and his "*long shining sword*" gained a reputation for it's great powers by the superstitious Hawaiians on Maui as well as the other islands. A young warrior chief, Kuala, of the island of Hawaii when Kalaunuiohua the King of Hawaii invaded Maui on his quest to unite the island group, took the "long bright knife of the strange warrior of Wailuku" from the Japanese Sea Captain in battle. After striking the "*bright knife*" from the hand of the Sea Captain he buried it on the battlefield. Later he and his adopted mother Waahia, a prophetess, retrieved it and Waahia hid it on Molokai after Kalaunuiohua had moved on and conquer that island. The island of Oahu was the next island to be conquered by Kalaunuiohua. With his success in conquering the three islands he enthusiastically proceeded to invade the island of Kauai. Waahia warned him of his impending defeat

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<sup>f</sup> *The Legends and Myths of Hawaii* - The Fables and Folk-Lore of a Strange People by His Hawaiian Majesty King David Kalakaua, published by Mutual Publishing, 1990, Honolulu, Hawaii - ISBN 0-935180-86-9

against the military abilities of Chief Kukona who would lead the other chiefs of Kauai in a decisive simultaneous attack by land and sea to destroy the Kalaunuiohua forces. Waahia's prediction came true and Kalaunuiohua was taken prisoner. The royal chiefs of Maui, Molokai and Oahu who had been taken prisoner by Kalaunuiohua were released by Kukona and were forever in his debt. Through the fortunes of war Kalauna escaped and returned to Hawaii. He told Queen Kaheka about the king's defeat but could not tell her about his fate. In her grief at the thought of losing her husband, the Queen charged Kalauna with cowardice and ordered him from the palace in disgrace.

As the details of the Kalaunuiohua's defeat became known, Kalauna was constantly threatened and he had to continually fight to prove his courage. He eventually moved to Molokai with Waahia when it became clear that only the king could account for his bravery and loyalty. Before Waahia left for Molokai she revealed to the High Priest of Hawaii that Kalaunuiohua was being held prisoner and that the High Priest would fail in his attempts to have him released.

After almost three years of failed negotiations Queen Kaheka called for Waahia's help to secure Kalaunuiohua's release. Waahia agreed to make the effort only after the Queen admitted she had unjustly accused Kalauna. Waahia met with the chiefs of Hawaii to agree on the terms of her participation. The chiefs agreed to support any terms she negotiated for Kalaunuiohua's release and that she would not be punished if she failed in her attempt. Waahia assured the chiefs that they did not have to honor any terms that affected the sovereignty of the islands or their personal wealth and position.

Waahia planned her arrival on Kauai with the beginning of the celebration for the end of the Hawaiian year. During the singing, dancing and chanting before Chief Kukona, Waahia presented a chant about the powers of the "*long, sharp sword which was harder than bone or the seasoned wood of their weapons and whose polished surface defiantly threw back the bright rays of the sun*" but it was lost. She repeated the chant two more times on following days manipulating Kukona until he had a great desire to possess the sword. He came to believe that she was the only one who could bring it to him. To possess the "*long bright sword*" he eagerly agreed to release Kalaunuiohua and have him escorted to Hawaii by three high chiefs of Kauai. Kukona also agreed to release Kalaunuiohua only after he agreed to the marriage of his daughter Kapapa to Kalauna.

Waahia retrieved the "*shining blade*" from Molokai and delivered it to Kukona. Kalaunuiohua's return to his kingdom of Hawaii was joyfully celebrated. He fulfilled his agreement and, as Waahia predicted, lived the remainder of his life in peace. He left his Kingdom to his son, Kuwai who continued a life long friendship with Kalauna.

As agreed Kalauna and Kapapa were married. The marriage was distasteful to Queen Kaheka but she could not prevent it. Kalauna and Kapapa became the head of an influential Hawaiian family.

*“The long bright sword of the Japanese Sea Captain that became the ransom of a Hawaiian king remained with the descendants of Kukona but this story does not tell us where it is today”.*

The modern day Japanese warrior, Sekiguchi Komei’s performance that morning refreshed this legend in the minds and hearts of these current day Hawaiian warriors. Sekiguchi Sensei has traveled to Oahu and Maui many times bring the Japanese Culture to island communities. He reaches out to people who have an interest in their Japanese heritage, the culture of the Japanese sword and Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu Jujitsu. On these visits he represents various Japanese groups who are dedicated to perpetuating Japan’s martial arts, promoting and providing education about the country of Japan. He also represents the Komei Juku that is based on his personal efforts to promote understanding of the Japanese culture, understanding of diversity in our world communities and to promote worldwide friendship and peace. His Maui Komei Juku is only one of several schools located through out the United States. He has also founded schools in over 15 countries around the world. This effort keeps him traveling worldwide most of the time so he delegates the leadership of his Komei Juku in Japan to the able local instructors.

Members of a group of the modern-day Hawaiian warriors (*by name*) who study and practiced their martial art of Lua had seen performances of the Maui Komei Juku lead by Sekiguchi Sensei. They first had a curiosity about the technical content of the sword forms but they soon became intrigued with the training methods as well as the preservation of the forms and philosophy of the sword art over many years.

In recent visits to Maui, Sekiguchi Sensei brought one of his iaijutsu student who is also and experienced and knowledge teacher of naginata. Sekiguchi Sensei and Shimizu Nobuko Sensei offers her naginata form, Ryoen Ryu Naginatajutsu as part the training curriculum during their visits to his schools and his cultural presentations around the world.

The Hawaiian warriors heard about Shimizu Sensei’s offering naginatajutsu at a seminar of Komei Juku on Maui and they came to view one of the sessions. It was here that they experienced this haunting presentation of iaijutsu by Sekiguchi Sensei. While they had seen pervious performances by Sekiguchi Sensei the performance that morning moved them very much because the surroundings and situation reminded them of their “Iron Knife Legend”. With this new and deeper appreciation for iaijutsu sword forms and the anticipation to train in the naginata forms and strategies that paralleled their use of the *pololu* (long spear) they made arrangements to attend other session. During these sessions there was a great deal of enthusiastic exchange of techniques and strategies with all participants trying the others styles. The demonstrations were impressive and exciting. There were also lively discussions in the Hawaiian, Japanese and English language about culture, history, philosophy as well as the diversity and the commonality of the three martial arts.

A part of each of these cultures crossed paths over 800 years ago and now the same parts of the cultures cross again today. The Japanese sword was the focal point of these meetings but there were many similarities between the two cultures at the time of the first meeting. The area of similarities that today's Hawaiian warrior and the Komei Juku members found became a bond between them. Japan and Hawaii are countries made up of several islands that were united after several attempts by charismatic warriors during extended warring periods. Both had a ruling class that was closely associated with their Gods. In both cultures a warrior class supported the ruling class and both were guardians of the common class that they exploited. Advancement in class was prohibited during some periods and was very difficult in other periods. Advancement in class might be accomplished through heroic deeds during battle. Both cultures had a code of conduct for the warriors. The values of the code were similar, focusing on service, honor, loyalty, compassion and ultimate martial training that built character, leadership skills, skillful use of strategy and personal skill that did not fear death. Mature warriors frequently became teachers of the arts in both cultures. Fighting styles and forms were held secret within family groups. Weapons were held in high esteem and there was a hierarchy for weapons related to warrior status or rank. In each culture a weapon symbolized authority and some weapons could even have mystical powers.

These similarities helped the warriors who came together from the two cultures at Sekiguchi Sensei's Komei Juku Seminar find special meaning in the training.

The Hawaiian warriors told us about the experiences with Sekiguchi Sensei and Shimizu Sensei that had special value. They were particularly intrigued and inspired by the method that Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu Iaijutsu traditions, forms and philosophy have been preserved and passed down from generation to generation over so many years. Their interest in this process is motivated by the fact that their martial art, Lua, along with other great parts of their culture was lost to generations of Hawaiians due to the influence and desire to control them by early Christian missionaries and early foreign business interests. In recent years there has been significant effort by Hawaiian communities to regain their culture through resurrecting their language, customs and arts. The Hawaiian warriors hope to rebuild the Lua art form to the level of understanding and appreciation by non-Hawaiians that their art of Hula presently enjoys. One Lua instructor gave special credit to the methods used by Shimizu Sensei to teach him naginata forms. He used these methods when he taught the *pololu* forms and he found her methods integrated his student's movements so they significantly improved their performance.

Sekiguchi Sensei, Shimizu Sensei and the Maui Komei Juku students were impressed with the commitment required from Hawaiians who wanted to learn Lua. If a young man or boy wants to learn Lua his father is required to participate with him in the training. The first thing a new Lua student must do is to make his own weapon under the supervision of an instructor. The making of his weapon is steeped in traditions and legends from the time of the harvesting of the wood from a specific forest on the island of Hawaii to shaping and forming it for its best performance. There is a ranking of weapons, which is symbolic of position and responsibility within the group. The position of the *pololu* or spear (which can be as long as twenty feet) is held in the highest of esteem as an offensive and defensive weapon. It was used to protect important chiefs and

it's size and length had a great psychological impact on their adversaries. Kyle Nakanelua gave several impressive and animated performances with the *pololu* that were more intimidating by his vocal punctuations. Shimizu Sensei was invited to perform with his 10-foot long *pololu*. Her superior naginata skills were useful as she gracefully and aggressively demonstrated her interpretation of some of Kyle's forms. Her strong budo spirit impressed the Hawaiian warriors and there was a lot of joy and pride in the exchange.

The training and cultural exchange went so well that the Hawaiian warriors made arrangements to honor Sekiguchi Sensei, Shimizu Sensei and the Maui Komei Juku members with a sacred ceremony rarely performed in the presents of non-Hawaiians. Because of the sacred nature of the ceremony only the participants of the training were allowed to be present. On a quiet Sunday afternoon a group of Hawaiian warriors gathered outside our dojo dressed in their orange-brown *malo* and traditional cloth that was loosely draped over their bodies. An impressive honor guard secured the building. High priest---- lead a procession of about 15 exalted warriors into the building and blessed the area with a resounding *oli* or chant. The dojo had previously been carefully prepared with *lau hala*, heavy woven mats, strategically placed on three sides of the room. The Komei Juku group being the guests in our own dojo were seated to the right of the entrance door where tall intimidating warriors holding their long upright spears were silhouetted by the sunlight where they were posted. The High Priest and some of his entourage sat down across the area from their guests the Komei Juku group. The rest of his group carried in a very large dark wooden bowl along with other paraphernalia. While the warriors were arranging the wooden bowl and the other supplies the High Priest introduced us to the Awa ceremony and it's significance in the Hawaiian culture. He pointed out that the preparation, presentation and the drinking of awa was reserved for occasions of communications, negotiations and celebration between chiefs and other high ranking or influential members of the Hawaiian communities. The formalities during the drinking of awa facilitated the interaction between members of the group and hopefully contributed to the marry making celebrating the conclusion of a successful gathering. The group of warriors that accompanied the large dark wooden bowl began the preparation of the awa by soaking the root of the Kava bush in blessed water. The root had previously been pounded in to long shreds. The water that washed the kava roots was squeezed and filtered through a cloth, the affluent being reused as the process was repeated. The awa that was now in the large wooden bowl was ready to be presented to and drank by the guests. A smaller bowl was filled with awa and delivered to the High Priest who paid his respect to the awa as he received it. He recited another chant took a sip from the bowl and had the bowl of awa taken to Sekiguchi Sensei as the ranking member of our group. The warrior who delivered the small bowl of awa to the High Priest and to Sekiguchi Sensei moved across the floor quickly and gracefully in a very low crouching walk being careful no to raise above the level of the High Priest or Sekiguchi Sensei, eyes. Sekiguchi Sensei received the awa, paid his respects to the high Priest, the bowl of awa and drank. The High Priest thanked Sekiguchi Sensei for coming to Maui and for sharing his swordsmanship and for offering his hand in friendship and peace to the Hawaiian warriors. He went on to speak of *mauli ola*, the breath of life and *aho nui*, patience as they related to Sekiguchi Sensei participation in the preservation of

his art and the Hawaiian warriors effort to reclaim their art. Shimizu Sensei and I were then served and drank in turn from our bowls of awa. In mass the remaining Komei Juku members were served and drank awa from their bowls. Then each Hawaiian warrior drank awa. During this time the High Priest told the Hawaiian legend about the Japanese Sea Captain's "*long bright sword*" that became the ransom for a famous Hawaiian king. As the story was translated to Sekiguchi Sensei he came to understand the depth of feeling and emotion the warriors had about their experience of meeting and training with him. We all also appreciated the significance and intimate way they sharing their culture with us.

The ceremony drew to a close when the High Priest directed one of the warriors who trained so enthusiastically in naginatajutsu presented Sekiguchi Sensei and Shimizu Sensei with very long lengths of wood that the warriors had harvested on the island of Hawaii, hewed into two and one half inch square poles and stored for ageing until they would be made in to *polous* (long spears). The nine foot long piece of wood given to Shimizu Sensei was dark red in color and oily to the touch. This *ohia* wood is heavy for it's size and obviously hard and durable. Sekiguchi Sensei's *kaula* (lightning) wood was light yellow in color with a few darks streaks and seemed to be equally heavy and durable. Both types of wood are prized for making spears. To the Hawaiian warriors I represented an extension of Sekiguchi Sensei spirit, his philosophy and ideas, therefore I was given an 18 inch long piece taken from his *kaula* pole. It was suggested that we make *polous* from the gifts of wood but with further discussions it was decided that we must make a set of Ryoen Ryu naginata, tanto and boken from each length of wood. When Shimizu Sensei received the *ohia* pole she immediately offered her favorite naginata that she had trained with for many years, to the presenting warrior. Sekiguchi Sensei followed by offering his iaito to the High Priest. Both Hawaiians were surprised and set back by the offered gifts. They politely declined the gifts saying the gifts were too significant and that they would accept gifts at a later time when the two senseis returned to Maui. Sekiguchi Sensei replied that it was more appropriate for them to accept the gifts now because "*there is no tomorrow for a samurai*". They clearly understood and appreciated the sediments of his proverb and humbly accepted the naginata and iaito. The warriors and their High Priest concluded the ceremony and withdrew with great dignity. After the Komei Juku members bid them farewell we returned to the dojo and sat, recounting to each other, our feelings and observations. It was obvious that all the members had been equally impressed and moved by this cultural exchange that was a reflection of an encounter between warriors from different cultures hundreds of years before.

Several days later, I requested permission to attend the next weapon making sessions that was being planned for new Lua students. I felt we needed more information and instruction about how to handle and work the wooden poles that were so reverently given to our Senseis. Guy Yunker, a Komei Juku student, and I were subsequently invited to one of two locations that were dedicated to the teaching of making and construction of the variety of Lua weapons. The location was in the shade of several large trees that were along side of an open front shed filled with a verity of tools, jigs and fixture used for the shaping of the traditional Hawaiian weapons. There were samples of the long and short

spears, daggers, long clubs and short clubs that some had shark-teeth along the edge of the club. About a half dozen new Lua students along with their fathers or male companion huddled in groups around several teachers who were going through various aspects of making a weapon. Much of the instruction was given in the Hawaiian language. As the day progressed we received instruction about the need to repeatedly lay out guidelines to assure that the nature of the wood was respected and to get the most out of the pole as it was fashioned into a weapon. We learned about several fixtures that would help us hold and guide our tools that we would use. There was a suggestion to use only one or two tools. As we watched the new students work we saw that the whole process of shaping and finishing was simple but demanded concentration, repeated evaluation and attention to details. We came away from the session with a greater appreciation for the traditions, care, skill, pride and feelings that each student was putting into his weapon. We could see that each future warrior was putting something into his weapon that would provide a bond that would make the two inseparable. In the following weeks Guy formed and finished the set of naginata weapons. This set of weapons was later used by Shimizu Sensei and Sekiguchi Sensei as well as inspected by ----- the Hawaiian warrior. Everyone approved and was pleased with Guy's finished product. Shimizu Sensei felt that because of the ohia wood's history and her relationship with the Hawaiian warriors she would leave the naginata for safe keeping on Maui. She always looks forward to returning to Maui to use them again.

The High Priest who Sekiguchi Sensei had given his iaito to passed it on to one of the Hawaiian warrior for proper care and safe keeping. I had spent time with this warrior at the weapons making session. He had previously made a bokken from his recollection of ones he had seen. It was a beautifully made bokken but it was not made in the classic Japanese style and had some unique features that were inspired from his training in Lua. His interest in the Japanese sword had been motivated by the fact that his Hawaiian name was Kukona. Kukona was the name of the Hawaiian warrior in the legend of the "Iron Knife" that took the sword from the Japanese Sea Captain at the battle to defend Maui. Because of this the High Priest passed Sekiguchi Sensei's iaito on to Kukona for safekeeping. Kukona and I agreed to meet so he could learn more about the Japanese sword and how to care for the iaito. During this meeting I learned that Kukona had made his bokken to use during a performance of a chant he had composed about the four winds on his home island of Oahu. He wanted to perform this chant while going through illustrative moves with his bokken at a prestigious upcoming gathering of Hawaiian warriors on the island of Hawaii. Warriors come from all the islands to this largest annual gathering of Hawaiians. He received permission from the High Priest to use Sekiguchi Sensei's iaito in this presentation if the Maui Komei Juku felt it was appropriate. I had Kukona show me his planned performance. His execution was a very strong and graceful kata that was reminiscent of a kenbu performance. His singing chant added energy to the moves. I assured him that Sekiguchi Sensei would be very pleased with this presentation for the other Hawaiian warriors but I thought we could modify some of his moves, without changing his intent, to take advantage of the length and characteristics of the Japanese sword. His combat style and use of the iaito was more like combat with a short knife in close hand-to-hand contact. We opened up and increased the size of his sword movements and he adjusted his mae to bring the

monouchi into play more often. The resulting performance married strong Hawaiian Lua that illustrated his melodic chant with the larger sweeping sword movements. He had created a stoic Hawaiian combat story supported by sword movements that took advantage of the characteristics of the long sword.

Sekiguchi Sensei has devoted a great part of his time as the 21<sup>st</sup> Soke of Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu Jujitsu introducing the Japanese culture and iaijutsu to people outside of Japan. He has been tireless in taking every opportunity to bring friendship, peace and interaction between cultures as well as the other values of his Komei Juku to many countries through out the world. People who appreciate these values often invite him to establish schools in their countries. He continues to support these schools with visit on a regular basis. Each year in various countries more branches of Komei Juku are added and these branches are now interacting, increasing the contact between different cultures. Sekiguchi Sensei believes this interaction between cultures brings greater understanding and tolerance between people while enriching their experiences. Over the 30 years he has been bringing cultures together there have been many rewarding experiences. I share this experience because I think it is unique to have the Japanese sword bring the Hawaiian culture, Japanese cultures and their warriors together again after over 800 years. All of the participants in this current experience shared a deep feeling of nostalgia and contact with this older experience. I hope you will have the opportunity to read the "Iron Knife" legend written by King David Kalakaua in his book "The Legends and Myths of Hawaii." You can enjoy the picturesque visions he paints of the life and customs and will bring a greater appreciation for the Hawaiian culture. Thanks to Sekiguchi Komei Sensei's efforts to bring cultures together, King Kalakaua's story telling and our interaction with the Hawaiian warriors our experience with Komei Juku Iaijutsu on Maui continues to be enriched.