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Interview with Kondo Katsuyuki

Part 3

Sensei, besides your training in Daito-ryu, you have been studying the life and works of Tesshu Yamaoka [1836-1888], who was a master of Zen and the sword. You also have a wonderful collection of his calligraphy. Would you tell us something about him?



Tesshu Yamaoka (select image to view)

I first encountered Tesshu Yamaoka Sensei when I was in high school. I happened to find, in a secondhand bookshop, a book titled *My Master*, written by a student of Tesshu Sensei named Ogura. I was fascinated and finished reading the book in one night. I discovered for the first time that there was a man named Tesshu Yamaoka who had been involved in the last days of the Tokugawa shogunate. From that time on I became wholly devoted to Tesshu Sensei. I began to study him and collected books about him.

If I had to describe him in a single sentence I would say that he was a man who exerted himself on behalf of others. I believe he was not thinking of the times he was living in, but rather five hundred years into the future. So I believe the name of Tesshu Sensei will still be widely known even four hundred years from now. Tesshu Sensei is supposed to have penned between one and three

million pieces of calligraphy, and he used them all for others. For example, in the last days of the Tokugawa government, there was an active anti-Buddhist movement, and many temples, images and statues were destroyed. Tesshu rebuilt those temples. He was always putting others first and spending money on them and so he was not well-off. Although he was the son of the rich Ono family, who were direct retainers of the Shogun, he married into the Yamaoka family, a family of foot soldiers, who were samurai of the lowest rank. Tesshu Sensei never took advantage of anything or anyone. It seems that he underwent very severe training in his youth. He continued to train sincerely and thoroughly.

When he was at the Kobusho dojo¹ at the age of twenty-one, he is recorded as having demonstrated how kendo should be practiced by thrusting through a one-inch-thick piece of elm-wood paneling with his wooden sword to vent his anger at the half-hearted practice he saw. It is also said that he smashed the wrist bone of a practice partner with his *kote* (wrist) technique even though the latter was wearing a protector. Thus, in his younger days, he relied heavily on his physical stamina and power.

However, after achieving enlightenment on March 30, 1880, his practice was transformed. He is reported to have become invincible and his sword became alive with ki and full of spirit. I believe that he became spiritually awakened, yet he continued to value his modesty.

People say that Tesshu Sensei's sword was very slow in his later years. Sasaburo Takano, a well-known kendo master reported:

When I asked Yamaoka Sensei to practice with me, I could strike him whenever I wanted. However, he would occasionally thrust at me. He didn't hit me, but stopped his sword about an inch from my throat. I felt then that he had already passed his prime. But, when I took off my face guard after practice I felt a coolness around my throat as if there were a windhole in it. My throat still felt cool even after I arrived home. It was then that I understood for the first time the greatness and genius of Yamaoka Sensei.

When Tesshu Sensei reached the age of forty-five, he changed and so did his calligraphy. He had attained spiritual enlightenment. However, he still had a sexual appetite, which he rid himself of when he was forty-nine. Then again, his calligraphy changed and so did his sword. His calligraphic pieces penned after age forty-nine are considered to be divine art. He is regarded as the last true swordmaster. He was also creator of the Muto-ryu sword school, the last sword school. Tesshu achieved expertise in three areas: the sword, Zen, and

calligraphy. He united all three paths and burned out his life at age fifty-three, while sitting cross-legged in *zazen*, in front of his students. He died of stomach cancer.

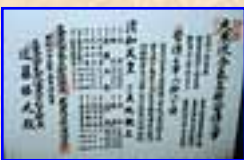
Historically speaking, the bloodless surrender of Edo Castle in the last days of the Tokugawa government was credited to the efforts of Kaishu Katsu² and Takamori Saigo. However, the fact is that this was really achieved through the efforts of Tesshu Sensei and Takamori Sensei. I understand that Tesshu Sensei always used to encourage people to give credit to others. I believe that the bloodless surrender of the castle was made possible through the application of all of his power, even though he was only thirty-three at the time.

I can speak endlessly about Tesshu Sensei. Although I can understand theoretically that he achieved mastery in three paths since their goals are one, I believe it must have been quite difficult. I do not think of Tesshu Sensei and Daito-ryu as separate things. Learning from the martial arts and from life are the same. "Budo and life are one and the same." For my part, I will keep practicing Daito-ryu diligently and do my best not to soil the name of the Takeda family art.

I would like to ask you about the current situation of the Daitokan, headquarters of the Daito-ryu aikibudo organization. I understand that since Headmaster Tokimune Takeda is currently [1992] in poor health the question of his successor has come up. This puts the Daitokan in a transitional phase.

A meeting of dojo heads was held in Abashiri, Hokkaido on September 7, 1991. On that occasion it was formally announced that the headmaster was undergoing medical treatment. This was understood to mean that it was no longer possible for him to travel around the country to train and teach.

Sensei, what is your role as *soke kyoju dairi*, *soke dairi*, and a holder of the *menkyo kaiden*, all credentials awarded by the headmaster?



Menkyo kaiden certificate awarded Kondo by Headmaster Tokimune Takeda (select image to view)



Menkyo kaiden transmission scrolls awarded Kondo by Headmaster Tokimune Takeda (select image to view)



Soke dairi certificate awarded Kondo by Headmaster Tokimune Takeda (select image to view)

Since I was designated as *soke dairi* by the headmaster on May 15, 1988, my role is to act on his behalf while he is undergoing medical treatment. There is a difference between *soke dairi* and *soke kyoju dairi*; the latter may give instruction and travel to teach as a representative of the headmaster. The *soke dairi*, of course, teaches, but also acts as representative of the headmaster in administrative matters. My idea is to do my best in consultation with Headmaster Tokimune Takeda and his designated successor.

Who will succeed the present headmaster?

At the meeting of the dojo heads held last September, the future headmaster was announced. Mrs. Nobuko Yokoyama, Tokimune's second daughter, who lives with him, was selected.³ This decision was not made at the meeting of the dojo heads, but rather was announced on that occasion by the Takeda family. Since I am serving the head family I cannot interfere in this matter. The head family has announced the next headmaster and my duty is to abide by its decision.

Sensei, you mentioned the designations *kyoju dairi* and *soke dairi*. Historically, what do the *kyoju dairi* and *menkyo kaiden* qualifications mean and who has been awarded these certifications thus far?

There are quite a few people who received the *kyoju dairi* during Sokaku Takeda's time. Morihei Ueshiba Sensei was one of them. Also, there were Kotaro Yoshida Sensei, Kodo Horikawa Sensei, Toshimi Matsuda Sensei, Yuki Yoshi Sagawa Sensei; all together I know of eighteen people who received the *kyoju dairi* from Sokaku Sensei. The *kyoju dairi* qualification is solely concerned with being able to teach on behalf of the headmaster. Therefore, receiving the *kyoju dairi* qualification means that a person may begin giving instruction as the representative of Sokaku Sensei or Tokimune Sensei.

The branch dojo (*shibuchō*) heads are qualified to teach only within their

branch dojos under the umbrella of the headquarter's director, who is the headmaster. For example, the head of the Yokohama branch dojo cannot go to Saitama and teach. However, a holder of the *kyoju dairi* certification may do so. One can teach anywhere in Japan if he has received the *kyoju dairi* certification. The organization today is the same as in the past and one can instruct in place of the headmaster, currently Tokimune Sensei. This qualification is called either *kyoju dairi* or *dairi kyoju*.

So if a person has received the *kyoju dairi* certification it means he has trained a great deal. What are the training requirements for receiving this qualification?

One of the standards for receiving this certification is a knowledge of the *goshinyo no te* (self-defense) techniques. If a person has been taught through the *goshinyo no te* techniques, he may be awarded the *kyoju dairi* certification. In my case, I was taught the *goshinyo no te* techniques and received the *kyoju dairi* in 1974.

I believe there are several steps before reaching the *goshinyo no te*, so I would imagine that these techniques are of a fairly high level.

Yes. The first techniques one learns are the 118 techniques of the *hiden mokuroku*, and the next level includes the fifty-three *aiki no jutsu* techniques (*omote* and *ura*), the thirty-six *hiden ogi* techniques (*omote* and *ura*), the Daito-ryu aiki nito-ryu *hiden* techniques, and finally the eighty-four techniques of *goshinyo no te*, that is, *jo* (upper), *chu* (middle), and *ge* (lower). *Kyoju dairi* certifications were usually awarded after these techniques had been learned, but some of the teachers who received the *kyoju dairi* did not learn them all.

What about the *menkyo kaiden*? Is it a much higher level than *kyoju dairi*?

The *menkyo kaiden* means, as is indicated by the characters used, that all of the knowledge has been transmitted to the recipient, that everything in the system has been taught. In Daito-ryu, we have the *kaishaku soden* level which includes 477 techniques. After that one learns the eighty-eight *menkyo kaiden* techniques.

People may think there are only two levels after the *goshinyo no te*, the *kaishaku soden* and then the *menkyo kaiden* techniques. However, in addition, there is another important body of knowledge in Daito-ryu--all of the Daito-ryu oral teachings and secrets. I can't express these in a few words, but they are something fundamentally important to Daito-ryu. In my case, it took fourteen

years to go the two steps from *goshinyo no te* to *kaiden*.

Who received the *menkyo kaiden* from Sokaku Takeda?

Two people, Masao Tonedate and Takuma Hisa, received the *menkyo kaiden* from Sokaku Takeda.

And you are the only person to have received the *menkyo kaiden* from Tokimune Takeda Sensei?

Yes. I was awarded the *kyoju dairi* in 1974, but Shimpachi Suzuki received the *kyoju dairi* before I did. Since Shimpachi Suzuki Sensei's death I have been the only person to hold the *kyoju dairi* certification. Consequently, I am the only one to currently have been awarded the *kyoju dairi* and *menkyo kaiden*.

I mentioned this earlier, but I believe that this is an important transitional phase for the Daitokan. This is due to the status of the headmaster's health and I think a number of things have been misunderstood. Munemitsu Takeda, the younger brother and student of the headmaster, sent a notice this April [1992] to the heads of branch dojos and people connected with Daito-ryu stating that he had become headmaster of the school. In response to this, the Daitokan published an announcement in the Japanese-language edition of *Aiki News* (no. 89) indicating that Mr. Takeda had acted on his own and did not represent the Daitokan. Has the Daitokan taken any other measures in this regard?

I am one of the directors of the Daito-ryu headquarters and, if I may be permitted to speak on its behalf, it is not necessary for it to respond or deal with this matter in any way. Mr. Takeda has unilaterally declared himself the headmaster. The Daito-ryu headmaster will be responsible for preserving the techniques perfected by both Sokaku Takeda and Tokimune Takeda, and both of Tokimune's children Nobuko Yokoyama and Kyoko Oshima and their children should succeed Sokaku Sensei, who was the inheritor of the Takeda family tradition of Daito-ryu. So we have no further comment on this matter and we don't consider it to be a particular problem.

Did Munemitsu Takeda ever learn Daito-ryu from Sokaku Takeda?

I don't know, since I wasn't there, but according to the headmaster, Mr. Takeda learned a little from Tokimune Sensei and merely observed Sokaku Sensei's techniques. From what I understand he didn't actually train with Sokaku Sensei.

To go back a little, when the problem of the selection of the next headmaster emerged, there was a rumor that you yourself wished to become the next headmaster.

It seems that there were quite a few rumors! One of the rumors was that I would become the next headmaster and I also heard a rumor circulating that I had purchased the right to become the next headmaster. I think that this misunderstanding arose when I became the *soke dairi*, as a result of the mistaken idea that being *soke dairi* was equivalent to becoming the next headmaster. The role of *soke dairi* is to act strictly on behalf of the headmaster and a *soke dairi* cannot become a successor.

I don't want there to be any mistake about this point, but when I became the *soke kyoju dairi*, it was my intention to serve as the headmaster's protector. In other words, it was all right for me to become the villain and I took on the role of scapegoat. As a result, I think some people came to fear me. My intention was to improve the Daito-ryu organization and Daito-ryu itself.

The thankless role I have played so far will necessarily change due to the headmaster's poor health. I don't think that the Daito-ryu organization in Japan can unite if I continue to act as a scapegoat. Until now everyone has called me "Devil Kondo," but I would like to exert myself to the point that people will one day call me "Buddha Kondo!"

I think that I am entirely to blame for the fact that people have believed that I will become the next headmaster. However, since I would like to discharge my duties as *soke dairi* out of loyalty to the headmaster and in return for his kindnesses, I would like to ask for everyone's cooperation.

Recently, articles featuring a group in Kyushu that calls itself Saigo-ha Daito-ryu aikibujutsu have been appearing in Japanese martial arts magazines. The most problematic point for me as a historian was a chart, printed in one of these articles, tracing a continuous Daito-ryu lineage within the Aizu clan from Tanomo Saigo, through Shiro Saigo, to a certain Yamashita Shihan and finally to the present Sogawa Shihan. Would you give us your opinion on this subject as the *soke dairi* of the main school of Daito-ryu?

Properly speaking, there is no connection whatsoever between the Saigo-ha and Daito-ryu schools. They should not call themselves Daito-ryu because there is no relationship at all between Daito-ryu and the version of history they are offering.

Please tell us about your future hopes for Daito-ryu and the direction in which the art should move as you see it from your position as *soke dairi*.

That's a really difficult question. I would have to consult with the headmaster, too, so please consider what I say as my personal thoughts.

Naturally, I would like to hand down the original Daito-ryu to posterity. For example, I think that one way of approaching this is to spread the art to many people, while another is to stress quality and limit the number of people having access to the art. I think the headmaster prefers the latter approach.

I am now building a dojo for *uchideshi* in Koshimoda, in the Toi region of Shizuoka, from which Mt. Fuji is clearly visible. My idea is to hand down authentic Daito-ryu by adopting a live-in student system in a healthy environment. Based on my experience so far I don't think the authentic art will survive unless I do this. Foreigners will be welcome there, too.

So far Daito-ryu is not particularly well-known abroad, but Daito-ryu instructors from schools other than the Daitokan have been active in various places. What are your ideas about future activities of the Daitokan abroad?

There is something that concerns me about this question. It sounds like the Daitokan is one school within Daito-ryu. But the Daitokan is the name of the headquarters dojo of the Daito-ryu organization, so I hope there will be no misunderstanding on this point.

Headmaster Tokimune Takeda appointed Yoshimi Tomabechi as the director of the overseas instruction staff on September 10, 1988 and on the same day I was appointed director of the overseas headquarters. The headmaster wanted Mr. Tomabechi and me to organize our overseas activities.

Naturally, it is possible that Daito-ryu will be spread abroad in the future. Requests are now coming in from many foreign countries. At the present time, a number of foreigners are training at Daito-ryu branch dojos and I think it is no longer possible to ignore overseas affairs. The headmaster's policy is to grant authorization to open branch dojos to persons who have been awarded a minimum of third dan.

Are there any foreign practitioners who have reached that rank?

The headmaster has awarded a third dan to Mr. Alain Floquet of France. There are also many foreigners training at branch dojos, and there are people from the United States, Australia, Canada, and other countries training at my dojo. I look forward to the future.

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