

November 2010

KOKORO

WOMEN IN FOCUS



**Courageous
Heart Dojo**



COURAGEOUS HEART GOES TO THE KUNOICHI TAIKAI

...shh...Secret Women's Business...

- by Kirsten McLeod

September 17-19 2010 saw the staging of the first ever Bujinkan Kunoichi Taikai. Approximately 250 kunoichi of varying grades from all around the world made the trip to Hannover, Germany, for the opportunity to train, network, exchange ideas and learn from some of the most highly ranked female practitioners in the bujinkan. I was fortunate enough to be able to make the trip and can best sum up my experience as "mind blowing".

The atmosphere for the entire three days was amazing. There was a genuine sense of camaraderie and, despite the mix of languages, everyone was keen to share their ideas and experiences. While we at CH are lucky in having female shihan, for many of those attending they were the only woman in their dojo and had never seen a female shihan. The sight of so many women committed to their training - some over decades - was encouraging and inspiring. With most attendees - including the instructors - staying onsite at the sports academy, meals and evenings were further opportunities to discuss training, the bujinkan, and the history of women in our art.

The training itself was varied and each session reflected the instructor's personal style: from Sabine Frohlich's very

technical session on ichimonji, to Estelle Padeloupe teaching how to use your spirit, and Mariette van der Vliet showing the value of moving 'just enough'. Sessions were broadly themed around taijutsu, reality budo or weapons, which saw a range of different techniques and weapons being incorporated - from tachi to kusarifundo to everyday objects like clothing and credit cards. I found the teachings not only on a physical or technical level, but philosophical; Natascha Morgan's call to "be endless curious about everything in life" and to "look at things with martial eyes" offering an insight not only relevant to one's training but to life.

The three days came to an end far too quickly. After the group photo, signing of the event banner by all as a gift to Soke, and the furious exchange of email addresses, we all headed our separate ways. But not before an emotional bow-out and thank you to the 14 incredible shihan (including our very own Gillian and Frances) - the applause, whistling and foot stomping continuing for several minutes. The whole event truly was memorable and one that I'll carry with me in my life and my training for years to come.

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And in our own backyard...



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by Ana Rodriguez

It is a bit hard to describe what my experience was in words, but I hope that the below can help somehow to get an understanding...

The Kunoichi Taikai was a great opportunity not only to learn more techniques or to improve my taijutsu, but most importantly to connect to other women in the Bujinkan. There was such level of camaraderie and good vibe in the air that having a different background was not an obstacle to enjoy training for anyone.

There was an important point that got discussed and it has to do with the fact that in doing a technique there are 2 sides, the female side and the male side. Cinzia and Sheila pointed out that, according to Hatsumi Sensei, everyone should aim for both. Men should find that feminine side that will complement their technique, while women should find and use the masculine one. It is about having balance.

Some of the important things to keep in mind and keep working:

- It is not about doing something complicated or fancy, just make it simple.

- Maintain control all the time.

- Take balance of uke by using your whole body. Regardless of how light or small we are, if we have the right timing and intention it is easy to get uke into trouble, or maybe uke gets in trouble himself.

Fran has mentioned it a lot of times before (and shows it!), and I was able to see it when Natasha used her knees to control uke's legs. She is not particularly a tall and strong person and can easily take control! Well, in reality it is more than just the legs ...



Naginata - the primary weapon of the female samurai

- Basics are essential!

Most of the above might sound obvious, but by looking at different women and their movement it was more evident than ever that using the whole body is what makes it work. Outside, it looks very subtle but when trying it myself it felt powerful and even devastating.



Mrs Hatsumi - the first modern kunoichi

Kunoichi is the term for a female ninja, or practitioner of Ninpo. The term is thought to derive from the names of characters that resemble the three strokes in the kanji character for woman (女, onna); said in the order they are written: ku (<) - no (ノ) - ichi (一). In Japanese, the 'ku' is written in hirigana, 'no' in katakana and 'ichi' in kanji - add the three together, as in

WHO, WHAT ARE THE KUNOICHI?

the image below, and you get the Japanese word (in kanji) for woman.

Another proposed derivation is from the character 九能一 (能 "nō" : talent) with Japanese numbers "ku" (九) for "nine", and "ichi" (一) for "one", meaning "nine talents in one person", though no credible source lists these "nine talents".

The training of the kunoichi was different from the male ninja. Their training focused more on disguise, poisons, and using their gender as an advantage. They were trained in close combat and this knowledge was to their benefit if they were caught. Some of their disguises were as geishas, prostitutes, fortunetellers, servants and so on, in order to get very close to the enemy, or to use this intimacy to obtain information.

Kunoichi could hide their weapons in their disguise. Those weapons were: small blades up their sleeves, or in their belts, even in musical instruments or in sex toys,

poisons pins in their hair, or long nails used for raking, blinding powders, ropes and fans could be hidden and used at close range. There were also trained in more psychological warfare and mind manipulation. They could play on the emotions of the enemy with highly trained skills of intuition.

Modern day kunoichi fulfill the same roles as men, playing parts in security, law enforcement, private investigation (where they can still use various disguises and means unique to the gender).

In Bujinkan, the women train and study the same skills and techniques as the men. The emphasis is on effectiveness as power and strength is not a factor. This can be an advantage in learning the effortlessness of a technique, not being able to fall back on muscular strength. In real life situations, the combination of power and strength to the effortlessness of a technique can be formidable.

SOURCE: www.bujinkankunoichi.com



Hannover, Sept 17-19, 235 women, 14 shihan, 26 countries

From Sheila Haddad...

Soke has requested that women become more visible, that they become more united as a force in Bujinkan. He felt that having this taikai would lead to a better balance in the art. He requested something be done that would achieve this and he likes the idea of a Kunoichi Kai.

LIST OF SHIHAN (Names to know...)

Sheila Haddad - US and Germany *CONVENOR*

Mariette van der Vliet -The Netherlands

Natascha Morgan - UK

Marie-Valerie Saumon - France

Gillian Booth - Australia

Frances Haynes - Australia

Estelle Padeloupe - Canada

Cathy Lewis - USA

Sabine Frohlich - Germany

Carol Koch - USA

Angeles Bordón Mendoza - Canary Islands

Beth Zimmerman - USA

Patricia Witteman - The Netherlands

Sandra Elster - Germany

Check out their profiles:

<http://www.bujinkankunoichi.com/instructors>