

KYUDO EQUIPMENT CARE

by Dan Dayley

Those of us fortunate enough to appreciate kyudo know Shibata, Sensei has not only brought us an excellent practice but, as well, he has made available to us implements rich in tradition, power and beauty. These sacred implements are indeed worthy of our respect, appreciation, and mindfulness.

Because the practice of kyudo is path or "way", the process of learning about relating to equipment, to shooting and to our minds is life-long. Many details will, of course, be left to hands-on instruction by Sensei and his instructors.

There are several general guidelines for respectful handling of the yumi. It should be handled carefully; gently but firmly like a baby. It should be wrapped when stored and should never be exposed to moisture or extended periods of direct sunlight. When entering the dojo, the yumi should be held upright and in front of you. The yumi should pass through the entry first. As you exit the dojo, the yumi should be held the same way as when entering and should be in front of you as you bow. Yumi first when you enter and yumi last when you exit.

When your yumi is in your car, it should be situated feet forward, like a person. It's easy if you always think of your yumi as another living thing.

When standing a yumi against a wall, make sure it is positioned in a secure way: bottom on the floor, and only the head of the yumi touching the wall. Never place the yumi in such a way that it will easily fall down when unattended. Sensei has instructed his students to kneel down on one knee both when removing a yumi from its standing position, as well as when placing it against a wall. The same respectful gesture applies to ya (ya are always placed "tip to ground").

It is improper to stand or carry a yumi upside down, or to step over a yumi when it is lying on the floor. Also, it is disrespectful to touch or handle another person's yumi without their permission. Sensei has said this is like touching someone's spouse.

After each shooting session, the yumi should be vigorously rubbed, top to bottom, with a soft leather or cotton cloth. to remove soil or grease.

Always take care of your own equipment. Neither expect someone else to take care of it for you, or presume that you can take care of someone else's. "Baby bottle style" is not so good.

Finally, cultivate your awareness in the dojo. It is a shrine and practice situation. See what is around you, not only with your eyes, but also with your mind, so you can avoid collisions with other people and their equipment, even if they are behind you (Sensei says "mind look back").

Proper care of equipment is all part of the mind polishing practice that Sensei has so patiently brought to this country.

CONTINUATION ON CARE OF YUMI, YA AND KAKE

by Marcia Shibata

The yumi can be equated with a fine hand made instrument like the violin or guitar. They are similar in that they are made of wood (the yumi is mostly bamboo but has some wood; bamboo has been called not wood or grass but both) pressed, glued, shaved, heated, bent and formed by hand and with the help of tools, until a beautiful, delicate and balanced piece is produced. In the same light the yumi, as well as a good string instrument, must be handled with great care or it will twist, crack, break or some other undesirable state may befall it.

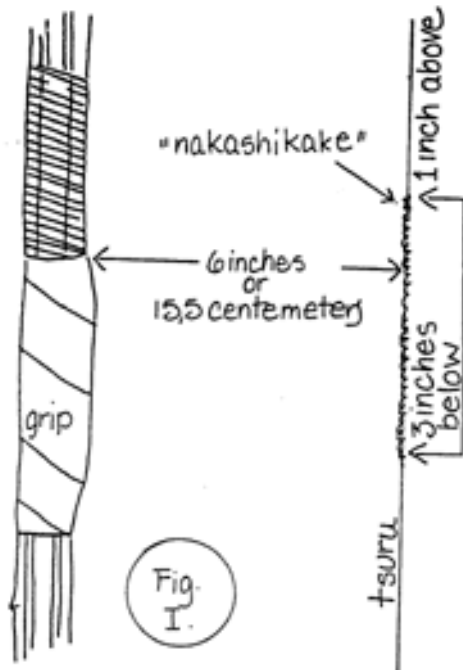
The yumi reacts to temperature, moisture or lack of moisture in the air, sunlight, harsh handling and gripping too strongly with the left hand.

Absolute "don't"s in handling the yumi

- Never shoot a yumi (twang the 'tsuru' string) without a ya. You will break it. Once the yumi is broken no one can repair it.
- Never leave a yumi in the sunlight or near a source of heat. This will dry the yumi out. The drying is guaranteed to cause breakage.
- Never shoot your yumi full draw if its been sitting unused between 6 months to a year. It is likely to break. In some cases, even 2 - 3 months will be enough for a yumi to stiffen up. You must break it in again slowly.

To break in a new or stagnant yumi, draw the tsuru back slowly only to your nose and release (remember you must use a ya) about 10 - 15 times. Then slowly increase the draw half an inch at a time until you have reached full draw. **YOU MUST BE VERY ATTENTIVE** to sounds of your yumi during this process. It may or may not have little creaking or cracking sounds. Little sounds are OK and normal. Big sounds may indicate the verge of breaking. So if you have your wits about you, and hear such a "big sound", immediately bring the tension out of the situation by bringing the tsuru and yumi back to its original position as fast as you possibly can. If you are suspicious, the next step is to get the yumi to Shibata Sensei for inspection.

- Never shoot your yumi if the tsuru is, more or less than a 6 inch distance from the yumi, measured between the top of the leather grip and the point precisely opposite the grip top on the tsuru (FIG 1). If the tsuru is too loose or too tight, which is noticeable by the incorrect distance between the two points, you must adjust it. The too loose situation is often caused by the nylon tsuru simply stretching through normal use. One danger is that the tsuru could cause the yumi to break by "going backwards on itself" at release. Another situation that will cause tsurus to become too loose in extremely hot, moist weather. In August of 1988, heat and humidity in the high nineties took its toll on yumis (the tsurus stretched on some yumis; twisting them at the top). In such cases Sensei can usually rebalance the yumi.



The "nibe", or deer skin glue yumi, can also delaminate in such hot, moist conditions and usually may be repaired by Sensei. Most yumis that we have as students (about 99%) are made with chemical glues so there is not a lot to worry about. "Nibe" yumis are expensive and usually custom made.

Notice that man's misuse or unawareness had no part in the difficulties with the yumi in the above situation. It is up to you as a student to be watchful and mindful during such harsh weather conditions and not to use your yumi when it's out of balance. Obviously, it could break.

- Do not leave your yumi out in the rain or drive in a rainstorm with the head or foot sticking out of a window.
- Do not shoot your yumi outside in winter temperatures below -5 F, especially if you have been keeping in your warm home.
- Do not expect your friends to know about yumis. If you let them handle it you must tell them not to twang it. By all means, never let a person shoot a yumi who has not had proper training.
- **DO NOT GRIP YOUR YUMI WITH THE LEFT HAND STRONGLY**, especially in such a way as to twist it. Almost all (99.9%) of twisted yumis are because of the left hand grip being much too strong. Beginners and old beginners are prone to grip too tightly. It's a hard habit to break, but almost always the yumi body becomes twisted and in some cases the head has broken off. If the twisting goes unnoticed the yumi almost assuredly will break. Remember, it takes an average of ten years to develop a proper left hand grip, so be extremely mindful about "soft grip".

Below is a diagram to teach you how to check for twisting. You should check your yumi each time before each session to check its condition. Again, your awareness is its guardian.

See figure 2.

Because all yumis are hand made they are not exactly the same. Therefore this diagram is a "generic drawing" in which your yumi will fit. But it is fruitless to think all yumis' bends will be exactly 100% the same. Get to know your personal yumi's lines upon purchase and know that it comes to you balanced. If it differs from your friends' by a tad or two, this does not indicate imbalance particularly.

When you sight your yumi from "belly button view", the tsuru on the top and bottom are usually centered for about the first 6 to 10 inches, then it will look as if the tsuru aligns to the right of the yumi along the body. This is correct. The rule is if the tsuru is anywhere between the center and right of the yumi body, all is OK. If it is moving LEFT of the yumi body this indicates danger, as what is probably happening is that the left hand grip is too strong and therefore the top of the yumi is twisting. So watch for a moving tsuru, especially at the top of the yumi.

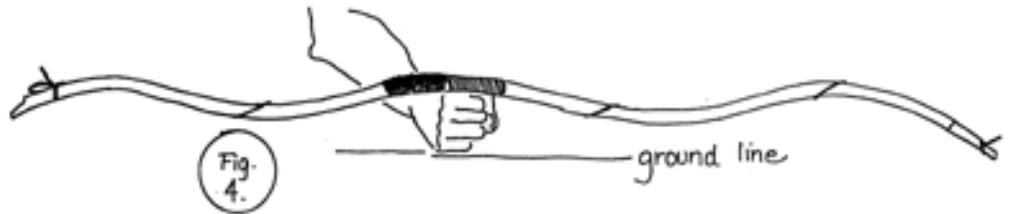
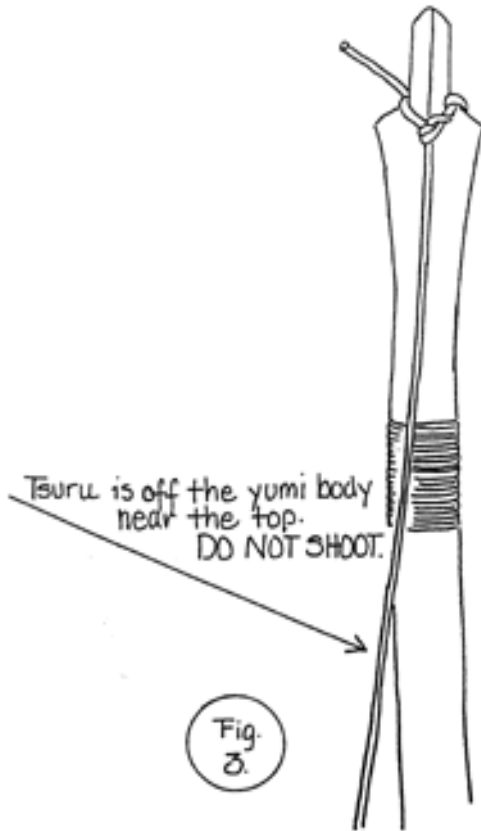
Figure 3: If the tsuru is sighted to be off the yumi body completely near the top as in this drawing, the yumi is in danger of breaking. Do not let things come to this point. The yumi must come back to Sensei for heating and repair. The best antidote is to be **EXTREMELY MINDFUL OF SOFT GRIP IN THE LEFT HAND.**



Fig. 2: Bird's eye view of Checking yumi.

This is also called "Belly-button view", as the yumi is held at the level of the navel with a **SOFT GRIP** so that the yumi can swing freely. Notice that the body of the yumi curves out to the left. This is correct if your yumi is in balance. The left hand curve is the last bend put in the yumi when it is made. Notice that the yumi is absolutely straight out from the body, not a little to the left or right. This is an important point for proper viewing / checking.

- Bamboo has a natural wax or oil, that exudes from its fibers. Therefore never oil you yumi or varnish it. Simply rub it down with a soft cotton or chamois as suggested in the first article. Avoid washing it with soap or chemicals.
- Most new yumis have a higher curve than used yumis (see Figure 4 for reference). Notice that the yumi is not strung therefore the curve is backwards.



Correctly a yumi should be one to two fists height between the floor and grip. This will and can develop when yumis are used regularly. It can not develop by just sitting around with the passage of time. But a student can facilitate the correct height curve a little bit by the "tsuru on - tsuru off" method.

Depending on how high the curve is (some are 3 or 4 fist's heights high), you can string your yumi for week's time then unstring it for the following week's time, then string it again for a week and unstring it for a week. You are regularly alternating the tension and non-tension. This will help tame it somewhat. Some yumis timing is different, e.g. instead of week alternating, your yumi may need 3 or 4 days alternation or month on - month off. Therefore, it is best to check with Sensei for the proper timing for you yumi. Remember all yumis are hand made and therefore are Individual.

The same problem does not always require the same solution. Please be aware of this.

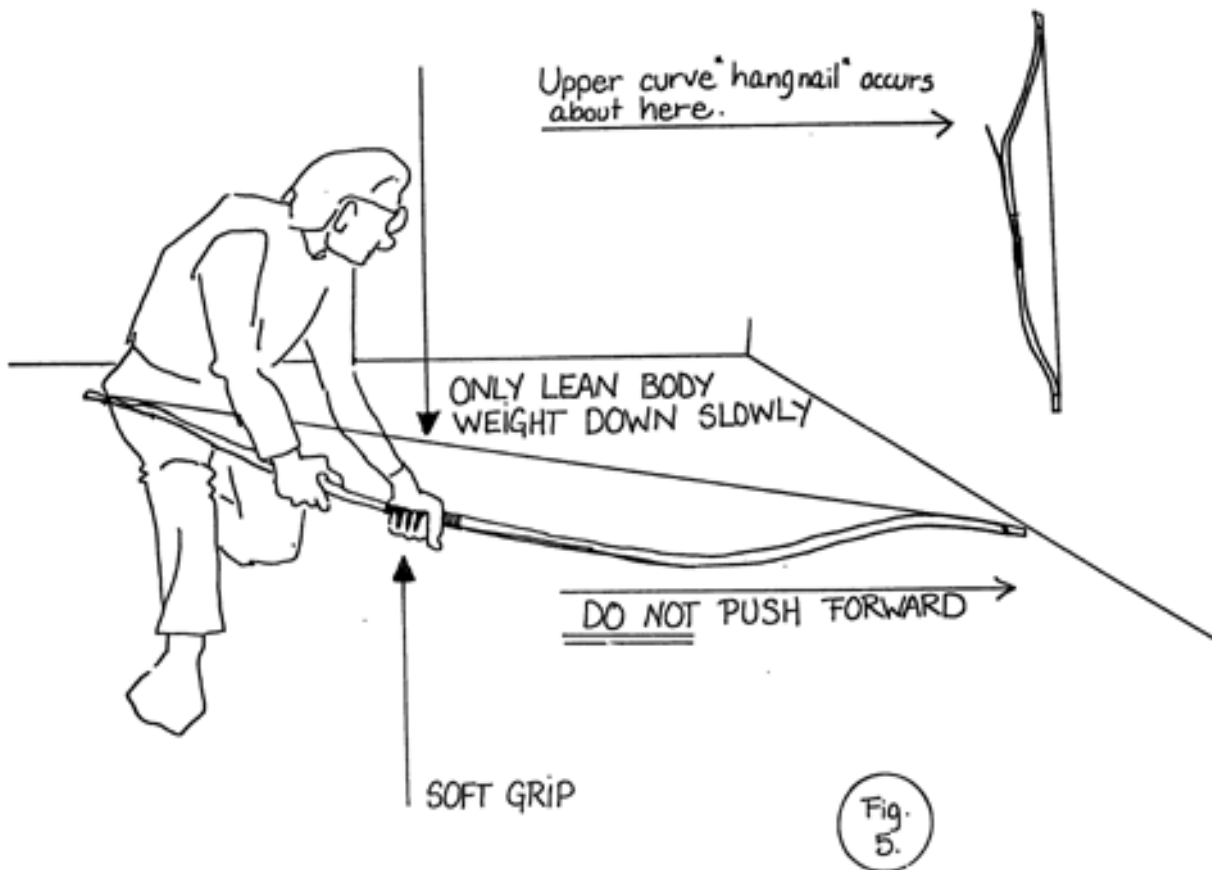
STRINGING THE YUMI

Once you have learned to properly string your yumi, be very careful not to become mindless about it.

There is one problem that can develop from improper stringing and we'll call it "back-sided hangnails" for lack of a better term.

PROBLEM: (see figure 5). The upper curve on the outside or back side will give way to a long hangnail of bamboo skin. It must be returned to Sensei for repair.

CAUSE: When pressure is placed on the yumi to string or unstring, the pressure should ONLY be STRAIGHT down, not down and forward. If down and forward pushing is done, especially if you use the wall to butt the yumi head against, you create stress on the upper curve. Eventually the "hangnail" will pop out.



When pushing down, remember not to squeeze the yumi's grip. Let your body weight lean into the yumi. The tiger's mouth once again is the contact point, without a tight grip or hand push.

YA CARE

Yas are more likely to break than yumis and this is to be expected as the ya is propelled and often hits objects harder than itself. There is not much you can do about this other than persist in your practice. But, like

yumis, yas are made of bamboo so do not oil or wax them. They have their own natural juices. Keep them out of hot places and if they become wet or muddy, simply clean them with a cotton cloth.

When removing them from targets or grass when the feathers have penetrated, it is best to pull them out by the tips or from the backside of the target so the feathers are not run backwards.

Always carry ya, especially if you are carrying your fellow classmate's, with the tips cupped in your left hand and the other hand gently around the shafts. If it is raining, cover the ya with an umbrella. Do not run back from the long distance target carrying ya, always walk. You may run down to the target for collection.

KAKE CARE

Kake have inner linings of white cotton. It is important to keep these clean as part of the integrity of kyudo (along with keeping your uniform clean). Never leave your kake in the sun or rain or place it where a dog or children can get a hold of it.

LOANING OF PERSONAL EQUIPMENT

Once you buy your own equipment, it is unwise to loan it to others unless the circumstances are very special. Special circumstances require that you as a student are well enough advanced in your practice to understand COMPLETELY the ability of the student being loaned your equipment to have the exact skills and understanding that you possess. The student being loaned your equipment should have the same hand size, height, weight and body strength. To be most ideal, the student being loaned your equipment should also have the same "mental tempo" or "energy" as yourself.

If such circumstances arise, it must be completely understood by both parties that if damage occurs to the equipment during the loan, the responsibility lies within both parties. You as the loaner have given permission to touch your equipment and the student-receiver has accepted the responsibility of using the equipment owned by another person. The two parties involved should come to an agreement privately should damage occur.

Basically, it is unwise to loan your equipment, and by the same token unwise to touch another student's.

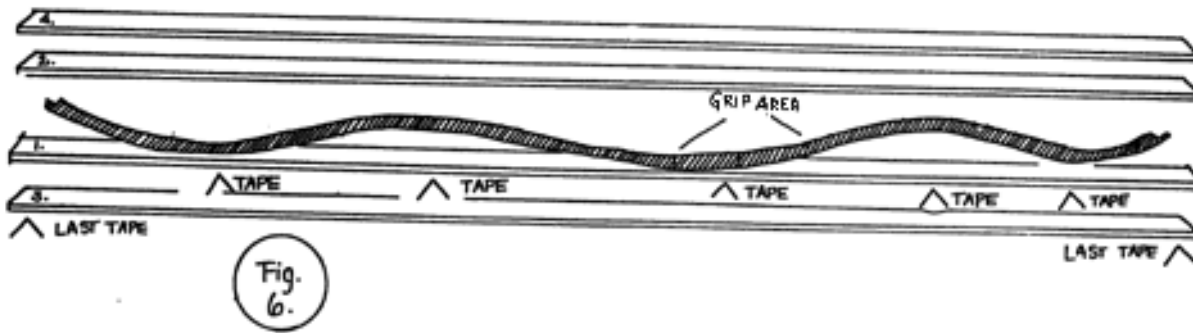
PACKING YOUR YUMI FOR TRAVEL

When traveling by car, place your yumi with the foot towards the front. Never let it be exposed to the sunlight for very long. You can cover the exposed areas (usually the head and foot) by laying 3 to 4 layers of newspaper over them. Never leave your yumi or ya in the car when heat will build up.

When traveling by air try the following method. This is not a guaranteed method, as once your yumi is out of your care and in the hands of the airlines, one really never knows. Its the best packing method we have developed so far.

You must have 4 pieces of 1/4" plywood, 2 inches wide by 8 feet long.

1. Unstring your yumi and wrap it in its cloth cover.
2. Wrap your yumi with newspaper or other paper, 1 ply only, wrapping on the diagonal to keep it thin.
3. Lay the yumi on one piece of plywood (see figure 6). Tape the yumi tightly in the places indicated in figure 6.
4. Place the second piece of plywood on top and tape again. Use duct tape or a similar strength tape, masking tape will not work.
5. Place the third piece of plywood on bottom and tape again.
6. Place the last piece of plywood on top and tape again.
7. Tape head and foot overhang pieces together.
8. Put your name, address, phone number, etc. in magic marker.
9. Remember to ask the check-in personnel at the airlines to "walk the yumi" down. A conveyor belt will probably break it. We have found tipping usually helps.
10. Don't forget to pack your tape.



PARTING SHOTS

You should put your name on each article of equipment you purchase. This includes your kake and yumi, ya or any equipment that you take to and from the dojo. Be sure yumis and wrappers that come to Sensei's house for repair have your name on it as there is always the chance it might be inadvertently switched for another.

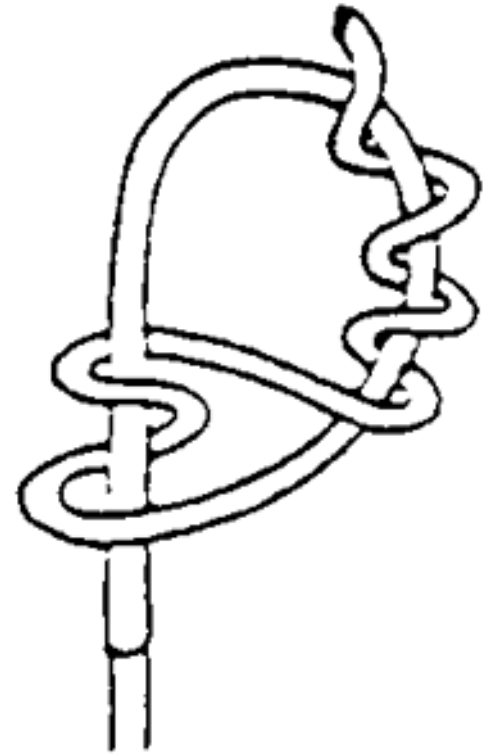
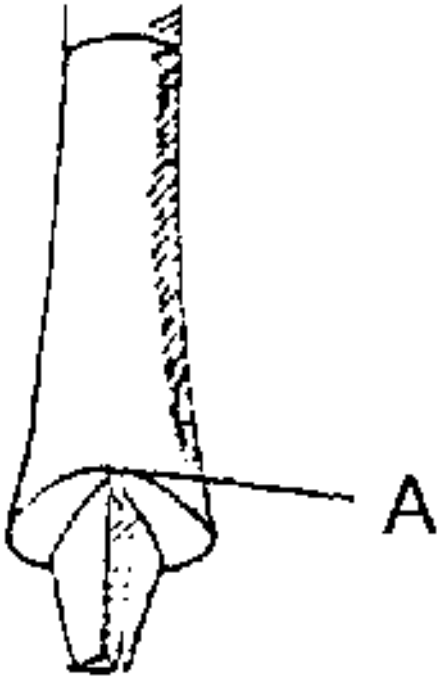
The local dojos, any institution hosting Kyudo Intensives, or the Shibata family can not be responsible for lost or forgotten equipment. If your name is on your equipment you will have a better chance to reclaim lost or forgotten items.

You should understand that repaired yumis are not the same as "un-wounded" yumis. Once a yumi has had a crack, break, delamination, or "wound", and it has been repaired by Sensei it cannot be guaranteed for long life. It has in a real sense become weakened or vulnerable. Yumis well cared for and well used and which never receive injury can live for 100 to 200 years.

So be mindful and careful of your equipment. It is expensive and hard to come by as most equipment comes from Japan. Supplies are usually limited with unpredictable availability.

Tsuru Tying and Care

To measure the length of a new tsuru, first put the bottom of the tsuru (white or purple) on the top of the yumi. Running the tsuru down the inside face of yumi, measure three fingers up from point "A" in the diagram. This is where the end of the loop will be. Tie the loop (red) according to the diagram. Reverse the tsuru, putting the red at the top. The red loop should always be on the top of the yumi. A tsuru that is too long or short may damage the yumi. When lengthening or shortening a tsuru, only the red loop should be adjusted. To check the size, you should have approximately six inches between the tsuru and yumi at the grip.



The top loop should fit the yumi like a necktie: snug, but not tight, and down the middle. A loosely tied red knot will slip when shot and possibly cause the yumi's top to twist. The top and bottom loops fit on to the yumi oppositely. On the top loop, the tsuru should loop around itself to the right (see diagram) and the bottom loop to the left.